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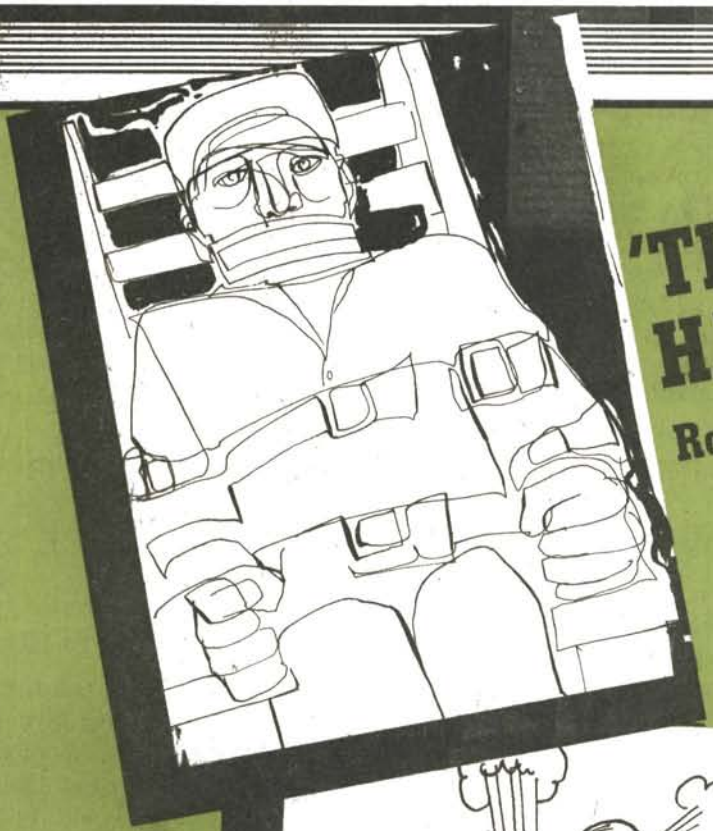

'THIS MAN HAS EXPIRED'

Robert Johnson

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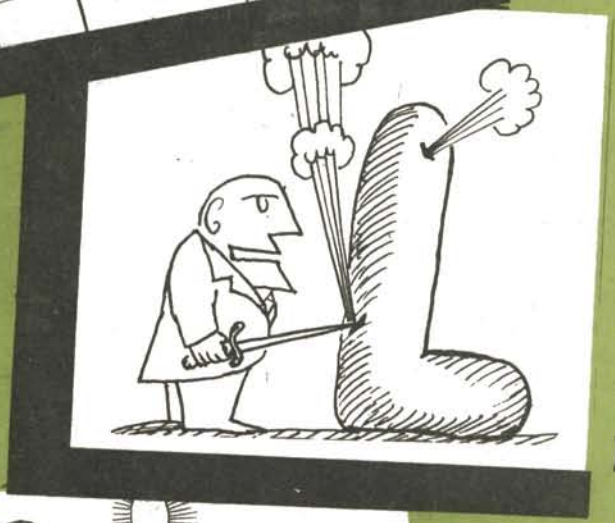
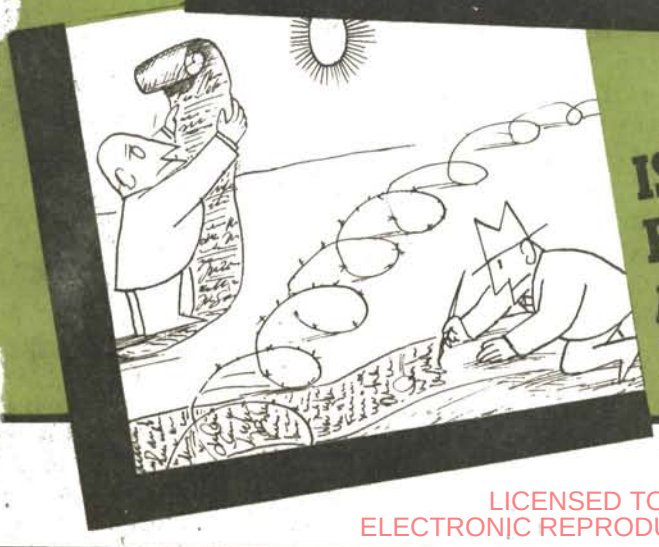


WHAT LIBERALS HAVEN'T LEARNED AND WHY

Fred Siegel



ISRAEL'S FATEFUL HOUR

A Review by Robert G. Hoyt

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CORRESPONDENCE

Vexing questions

Hyattsville, Md.

To the Editors: I found the Himes brothers' article ["The Myth of Self-Interest," September 23] very interesting reading. As an English graduate student and sometime instructor at a large state university, I am often frustrated by the lack of scaffolding from which to discuss values when so much of any cultural heritage concerns values. This problem seems directly related to the concern of the article—the integration of a socially nurturing vision into governmental structures.

However, the Himeses leave me with some vexing questions. How do we negotiate the territory *between* communities? Doubtless, Catholics would find the mission of building the kingdom less thwarted if the government fostered church-related institutions. But so would Jehovah's Witnesses, Muslims, Buddhists, and Mormons. And although I agree with the authors' characterization of the Reformers' view of original sin, and Hobbes's reduction of it, as inimical to many facets of human social development, I see other reasons for a system based on individual turf. The individual as the basic unit of political currency emerged as a common ground in a world that could not agree on a common good—a Europe rent by Protestant-Catholic violence. The horrific shadow of the same sort of sectarian strife still mangles Northern Ireland, India, and the Middle East.

And the doctrine of self-interest is certainly not the only stumbling block to public funding of institutions. Indeed, I wish there were less assumption of "the common good" in what the government sponsors—in projects and policies which I adamantly oppose, such as nuclear weapons and deterrence. The source of discord here is not due to conflicts of self-interest, but to what is closer to the altruism the Himeses would like to see institutionalized. Many honestly see a strong defense as an altruistic policy. Many see abortion funding as an altruistic policy. How do we negotiate radical divergences in values without making the kinds of compromises which force many religious people to withdraw from civil participation?

I believe there are answers to these questions, but I don't know what they are. I would like the Himeses to suggest some possibilities.

LINDA C. BRIGHAM

Self-interest is no myth

New York, N.Y.

To the Editors: The unsuccessful endeavor by co-authors K.R. Himes and M.J. Himes to reconcile the irreconcilable in "The Myth of Self-Interest" [September 23], is clear: The observations of Thomas Hobbes, as well as the ethical perceptions of Adam Smith and the Roman Catholic church's commitment to the community, are incongruous. Indeed, self-interest is only a myth within a philosophical context of pure idealism. If less than ideal expectations govern, self-interest and community may be reconciled; even if this dejects the authors.

While voters do not necessarily vote their pocketbooks (the Jewish community being most representative of this proposition) and while ideology may override, this premise does not make of self-interest a myth, because its very efficacy is evident.

The authors cannot obviate the conclusions of Hobbes merely by replacing them with subjective theological values of their own, or those of the church.

They may rightfully abhor self-interest, but they are no more correct than Hobbes in his belief that the predicate of community is self-interest. Likewise, with respect to Adam Smith, they may prefer the notion of altruism, but his observation that sympathy would constrain self-interest and foster the common good bears at least equal validity.

Perhaps the authors might contem plate whether the Roman Catholi perception of absolute community leac ultimately to state aggrandizement. They might also ruminate empirically abou whether liberalism and capitalism hav promoted more of the common good tha has the communitarian postulate c Catholicism. An unswerving commitment to a moral climate within society has been the hallmark of Judeo-Christia teachings. The argument with secular ists, nevertheless, is not over ends Which means, however, shall be em ployed? Is there to be a *more* perfec society, or *a* perfect one?

More virtue has been promote through self-interest than by Roma Catholic communitarianism.

ELLIOTT A. COHE

Smith according to Himese

Chestnut Hill, Mas

To the Editors: In "The Myth of Se Interest" [September 23], Michael a Kenneth Himes assert that Adam Sm tried "to resolve the problem of the cc

(Continued on page 26)

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COMMONWEAL

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Commonweal welcomes letters on subjects treated in its pages. Letters should not exceed 250 words and are subject to editing for clarity and space limitations.

The editors are always glad to consider any material for publication, but may we again remind readers that unsolicited manuscripts should be accompanied by a stamped addressed envelope. We regret that we cannot otherwise return such material.

Thrifts on the slide

Forget the cozy picture of Jimmy Stewart and Donna Reed in *It's a Wonderful Life*. Forget their struggle against Lionel Barrymore, the greedy banker, to build up their community through fair home-mortgage lending. Forget the thrift industry of yesteryear, which helped millions of Americans buy their own homes. Today's thrifts (also called savings and loans or S&Ls) are on the skids. Of course, there are still healthy S&Ls around, but fully one-third of the industry—1,000 institutions—is operating at a loss or is hopelessly insolvent. Many economists call the collapse of S&Ls the nation's biggest domestic crisis, one likely to require a government bailout of over $100 billion—even with the sale of the thirty-four insolvent thrifts rushed through before the end of the year.

Every month that the remaining weak or insolvent thrifts stay "in business" they add more than $1 billion to the federal deficit. That amount (over $15 billion a year) grows as sick thrifts steadily hike up interest rates in order to attract new investors, thereby increasing the government's insurance liability.

Savings banks and building societies date from the early nineteenth century. Their twentieth-century descendants, S&Ls, were long the nation's major source of loans for home mortgages. After widespread failures of S&Ls in the late 1920s, New Deal reforms set ceilings on the rate of interest they could pay and individual depositors were insured by FSLIC (Federal Savings and Loan Insurance Corporation). For years things went well. Then, during the seventies, inflation, oil price drops, and serious declines in real estate values began to take their toll on the industry—particularly in the Southwest.

The real crisis began in 1982 with federal deregulation. It allowed S&Ls to diversify, to make investments in addition to home mortgages. Deregulation removed the federal interest-rate ceiling and permitted higher interest payments to depositors. It also cut back on capitalization requirements, i.e., the amount of cash reserves the thrifts were required to hold.

Deregulation in and of itself might not have brought the S&Ls to their current fiscal malaise had there been adequate supervision by the Federal Home Loan Bank Board (FHLBB). Its laxity was encouraged by the Reagan-Bush three commandments: (1) deregulation is sacred; (2) the market regulates itself; (3) government oversight is a brake on market forces. In the early eighties, when the FHLBB's chairman, Edwin J. Gray, tried to scrutinize those S&Ls engaged in heavy speculation, he was hampered by the administration's cuts of FHLBB staff and by Congress's refusal to allocate enough money for the board to do its job. The upshot was too few investigators to go round. As thrifts became insolvent, the board didn't have the funds to pay off depositors and shut the thrifts down, a situation still true today. Some members of Congress—sluggish in reacting to the board's warnings and

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dependent upon the industry's PACs for campaign funding—ignored reports of dubious accounting practices used to conceal bad investments.

Another key element in this scenario is the FSLIC itself. In 1980, the federal government raised FSLIC deposit insurance coverage from $40,000 to $100,000 to help attract new investors. Moreover, in its rescues of ailing commercial banks (like Continental of Chicago), the government paid off virtually all investors, even those with deposits above $100,000. That action signaled to investors that they could go for the highest interest rates without any risk to themselves. Thrifts, too, bore little risk and counted on bailouts. But by 1986, FSLIC itself was bankrupt. Congress has since appropriated funds to revive FSLIC, but has not provided enough to cover the insolvent S&Ls. Even the current sales of insolvent thrifts to healthier institutions are so heavily government-subsidized—the 1988 tax breaks equal the capital they are investing—that the buyers face little risk in exchange for possibly high profits. This leaves taxpayers with both the risk and the bills.

The third key element in this debacle is the thrifts themselves. Too many managers brought on the crisis through a combination of bad investments, greed, and fraud.

- Although Wichita Federal Savings & Loan Association had been making a profit for several years in home-loan repossessions, it let itself be talked into the futures market in 1985, a bad investment that lost it millions in a few months. Meanwhile, it was forced to pay hundreds of thousands of dollars in fees to the consultants whose bad advice had left the thrift in tatters.
- North American Savings and Loan Association of Santa Ana, California was founded in 1982 by a dentist-turned-entrepreneur, Duayne Christensen. In a series of illegal deals in which a condominium complex was bought and resold—sometimes by subsidiary companies of North American owned by Christensen, and each time for a higher price—North American was able to inflate its assets on paper. It also generated exorbitant fees for Janet F. McKinzie, Christensen's top aide, who acted as a broker. In 1986, according to the *New York Times*, she bought $97,000 worth of jewelry, ran up bills of over $247,000 at Neiman-Marcus, and bought Rolls-Royces for herself and Christensen.

A House investigating committee in the mid-eighties reported that 80 percent of insolvent thrifts were involved in fraud. What can be done?

1. Most recent proposals tinker with insurance. Merging FSLIC and FDIC (Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation—which underwrites commercial bank deposits) is one idea. FDIC now has a surplus of funds. However, with commercial banks facing third-world debt defaults and other problems, FDIC may have other calls on these funds.

Premiums for FSLIC insurance, now paid by the thrifts themselves, could be raised to increase FSLIC funds—a proposal that penalizes healthy thrifts for the misdeeds of the unscrupulous.

FSLIC coverage could be either reduced or limited to $100,000 per individual. As it is now, individuals can deposit a dollar less than $100,000 in multiple accounts and be insured for all. Some have suggested that deposit insurance be taken over by private business, and investments be restructured so that depositors wanting insurance accept lower interest rates, while depositors willing to risk their money without insurance receive higher rates.

2. Some economists propose that the government quickly allocate enough money to the Federal Home Loan Bank Board to expedite closure of the hopelessly insolvent thrifts, thereby plugging the leaks in the system. At the same time, capital requirements would be increased and a contingent of accountants hired, both of which would help prevent future insolvencies.

3. The most radical solution being debated is to close the entire thrift industry. *Business Week* (October 31, 1988) argues that thrifts have outlived their usefulness as home-mortgage lenders, that other lenders have entered the mortgage market, and that healthy thrifts would best convert to commercial banks. Thrift officials, however, insist that individuals cannot compete for loans with corporations and need separate lending institutions, especially for housing.

Meanwhile, President Bush and the new 101st Congress are about to come face to face with the problem, and there are no cheap or easy answers. But three points can be drawn from the crisis and should be taken into account by policymakers.

First, deregulation cannot mean "no rules at all" (it must be clearly defined and its limits patrolled by adequate government supervision). Second, sufficient government scrutiny and oversight require money and political support for the investigators—money that must be provided despite the political influence of PACs. Third, the market does not regulate itself—as taxpayers will find out when they have to foot the bill for its excesses.

A DAY TO REMEMBER

The lightning speed with which significant historical events now transpire has rendered antiquarian Robespierre's observation that a single week of a revolution is "often richer in historical events than a year in normal times." Today, a more pertinent formula might be "What a difference a day makes." For Mikhail Gorbachev and the Soviet Union, and perhaps much of the rest of the world, December 7, 1988 may have been such a day.

On that day, a devastating earthquake sent thousands of poorly constructed buildings tumbling like children's blocks in the Soviet Republic of Armenia. The number of immediate victims was catastrophic, but the ineptness of the Soviet rescue effort further deepened the tragedy. The disorder of the government's response underscored the divisions, shoddiness, and incompetence that are endemic to Soviet society and that Gorbachev is struggling to change. The cost of the earthquake to the Soviet economy will be staggering, and the political

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"I guess we now own the house free and clear. The bank that gave us the mortgage just went under."

price may well equal it. Gorbachev was not greeted warmly when he arrived in Armenia. During the previous ten months of ethnic unrest in the region, he had stayed away. Nevertheless, his quick arrival on the scene of the disaster gained him stature in the sight of many Soviet citizens. Gorbachev dearly needs such capital.

Half a world away and but half a day before, Gorbachev had addressed the United Nations General Assembly. The content and character of his speech may make it one of the more remarkable addresses before that forum. While news reports in this country concentrated on the unilateral troop and weapon reductions the Soviet leader promised to carry out over the next two years, the scope of the speech was much farther ranging.

First, Gorbachev addressed the world debt situation by announcing that the Soviet Union was prepared to institute a lengthy (up to 100 years) moratorium on debt repayments from its least-developed debtor nations, and in some cases to write off those debts altogether. While the amount of such debts ($40 billion) is relatively small, the gesture might be seen as an important acceptance of reality. Second, Gorbachev proposed that the UN become the watchdog/whistle-blower for the world's environment. The USSR would help man an orbital space station for that purpose, and offer its controversial Krasnoyarsk radar station to the UN to monitor environmental studies from space. He also called for a strong framework in international law to prohibit weapons in space. Third, he announced that the Soviet Union plans to enact new laws that rule out any form of persecution for political or religious beliefs, and he further proposed that the jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice be binding on all states. Finally, there was his announcement of the unilateral withdrawals from Europe: 50,000 troops; 10,000 tanks; 8,500 artillery systems; 800 combat aircraft; and a reduction of "assault crossing units."

If these reductions take place, the world will be better off. They in no sense offer parity, but they do offer promise. The Warsaw Pact will still retain a 4 to 1.5 advantage in tanks alone over NATO. But the boldness of Gorbachev's initiative should not be lost or belittled. Its break with the past can be seen in the stiff resistance it met from the Soviet military and the subsequent retirement of Marshal Akhromeyev as Chief of Staff. President Reagan's statement that Gorbachev "recognizes that their massive [military] buildup has been responsible for the great economic crisis that he faces" is no doubt true. But Reagan failed to add that the shoe fits the U.S. as well, where the price of a single Stealth bomber is now estimated at over $550 million.

On December 7, *New York Times* columnist A. M. Rosenthal was in the Soviet city of Perm, a thousand miles east of Moscow. He watched Gorbachev give his UN speech over Soviet TV, and was moved by the statement that in the USSR "no longer are people kept in prison for their religious and political views." But next day in visiting labor camp 35, he found that that message had not yet arrived from Moscow.

Still, the relative new openness implicit in allowing Rosenthal's visit; the quick announcement of the disaster in Armenia and the readiness to accept international assistance; and Gorbachev's common touch and message in New York—all are further evidence of the sizable changes taking place in Soviet affairs. Whereas Ronald Reagan was inaugurated declaring a hyperbolic window of vulnerability vis-à-vis the Soviet Union, George Bush assumes the presidency with a very different and real window of opportunity.

THE NEW CONGRESS

FIGHTING OR FRIENDLY?

DEFICITS & SOCIAL PROGRAMS

The 101st Congress that convenes this month could prove to be one of the most fractious of recent years. It must attempt to deal with a growing list of politically sensitive domestic policy "crises": savings and loan bankruptcies; housing; long-term patient care; child care; health care in general; whether to limit Social Security; etc. Looming over everything is the deficit (a problem partially of Congress's own making), and complicating all their tasks are unresolved questions of ethics and the growing role of campaign financing. Nobody—not George Bush, not the advocacy community—is likely to have an easy time with the new Congress.

As Representative Pat Schroeder (D-Colo.) has observed, Bush came into office with the coattails of a bikini. As a result of the 1988 elections, the Democrats have a larger majority in the Senate (55-45), in the House (262-173), and among the nation's Governors (28-22)—a matter of future importance, since redistricting will follow the 1990 census. But numbers aren't the whole story, and Bush is not the only one facing potential problems.

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In the Senate, for example, where there are ten new members, and a comfortable Democratic majority, there are likely to be fewer votes overall for kids or health care or social welfare generally.

The biggest loss in that regard was Connecticut Republican Lowell Weicker. Winner Joseph Lieberman, a Democrat, may prove decent enough on domestic issues, but he doesn't have the stature, seniority, or sense of vision that Weicker had when it came to such different issues as biomedical research and helping families with disabled members. Weicker will be sorely missed.

And when it comes to domestic social policy, some of the new Senate members are clearly a change for the worse: Mack (R) for Chiles (D) in Florida; Gorton (R) for Evans (R) in Washington; Burns (R) for Melcher (D) in Montana; Lott (R) for Stennis (D) in Mississippi.

Two new members represent little change from the men they succeed: Nevada's Bryan (D) should be an improvement over Hecht (R), but his reputation as a fence-sitter makes that less than certain; and Vermont's Jeffords (R) may well produce a voting record much like Stafford's (R).

Only three replacements seem likely to be clear improvements: Kohl (D) for Proxmire (D) in Wisconsin; Kerry (D) for Karnes (R) in Nebraska; and Robb (D) for Trible (R) in Virginia.

The new/old leadership in the Senate (Mitchell for the majority; Dole for the minority) is intelligent, able—and chosen for their abilities in a television age. The powerful House and Senate budget committees have politically savvy, but usually cautious, new leaders: Jim Sasser (D-Tenn.) in the Senate, and Leon Panetta (D-Calif.) in the House.

Neither party in either house will have any women in any leadership position (Mary Rose Oakar, the Cleveland Democrat, lost her bid for a place in the House Democratic leadership, as did Lynn Martin of Rockford, Illinois, seeking to head the House Republican Conference). Representative Bill Gray (D-Pa.) will be the first black member to hold a House leadership post.

On the House side, the leadership (and membership) remains largely unchanged from what it was before November 8, and therein lies a problem: House Republicans are unhappy with Speaker Jim Wright of Texas. It's hard enough to be in the minority for thirty years, but Wright leaves many Republicans feeling that they don't even get a fair chance to express their minority views. Some of that is just personality. Tip O'Neill was as partisan as they come, but he was regarded as fair and respectful of everyone—political enemies included. Wright isn't. Nor are House Democrats pleased that there seems to be so much to the ethics charges Republicans have raised against Wright.

Some observers feel the tension with Wright is just a smokescreen for growing problems within Republican ranks, where members on the far right want a larger voice and have been pressing for a more aggressive stand vis-à-vis the majority. Unless they win procedural concessions (more members on key committees, more open floor debates), some Republicans are threatening to tie the House in knots.

That may help them vent their frustrations, but it won't make things any easier for the legislative process or for Bush and the new White House staff. Bush generally has a difficult task ahead. He inherits from Reagan a massive deficit; a legacy of bad feeling over heavy-handed (often less-than-honest) White House tactics in dealing with Congress; and growing pressure to raise revenues. But Congress rarely thought it could take on Reagan.

Bush is another matter. He is less able than Reagan to either charm, or go around, the Congress, and is saddled with a long list of campaign promises that would add substantially to the debt if pursued. An internally divided, distracted Congress is not in his interest.

Bush's first big test will come almost immediately, at the point when he sends Congress his version of the budget. There are already some indications that the last Reagan budget will contain enough vintage Reagan domestic cuts to let any Bush modifications look moderate (if not generous). But even so, it won't be easy. The federal budget already absorbs much of the Congress's time and attention; it has become the battleground for national policy. How Bush chooses to work with the Congress in framing the budget debate, and how Congress responds to him, will go far in determining whether this is to be the "fighting" 101st, or the "friendly" 101st.

NANCY AMIDEI

Nancy Amidei writes frequently on poverty, hunger, and human services issues in these pages.

In memoriam Kathleen Casey Craig

As we gratefully publish the list of the year's Associates (cf. pp. 28-31), we must pay a special tribute to the late Kathleen Casey Craig, President of Commonweal Associates for many years.

In the 1940s when the magazine found itself on the sheer margin of survival, month after month "Honey" Craig purchased common and preferred shares of stock in the struggling Commonweal Publishing Company. A warm and gracious person, she served as a director of the company for a number of years and continued to make substantial contributions to the Associates even recently.

Commonweal will greatly miss her generous interest and encouragement.

May she rest in peace.

Edward S. Skillin

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OF SEVERAL MINDS Abigail McCarthy

HANDLING THE HANDLERS

A PROPOSAL FOR CAMPAIGN REFORM

It is January—traditionally the time for resolutions and new beginnings. But we are sated by the indulgence of the holidays. We have been distracted from our own ills by disasters abroad. We are diverted by the changing of the guard between administrations and by the impending inauguration. All is spectacle, and we are lulled by the passing of time.

We have almost forgotten that we were stirred by resolve last November. We had just come through a numbingly long presidential campaign during which vital national issues were trivialized or ignored, and negative personal attacks and distortions took the place of serious debate. Appeals to the base and selfish in us overrode all efforts to talk sense. We told each other then that something must be done. The commentators and analysts agreed. We all said that the election process must change.

Unless we bestir ourselves to do something now, the precious heritage of self-government may eventually slip from our grasp. Only half of a disaffected electorate bothered to vote last year. Increasing numbers of citizens feel that they have no connection to their government. They feel helpless. "We need to rekindle a commitment of the individual to society at large and to government as an instrument of the popular will," says Curtis Gans, director of the Committee for the Study of the American Electorate. We need to resolve to do just that. But how?

First, we must muster the will and realize that we are not helpless. Step by step we can change things. For example, one of the most unhealthy changes in the election process has been the emergence and increasing influence of the political "handler." "These fellows are paid far too much to do the wrong thing," former president Gerald Ford told a talk show host. The very term "handler," used generally for the first time in this last campaign, implies one thing that is clearly wrong—their emphasis on winning means that presidential elections are little different from horse races, pet shows, or prize fights. In a closely reasoned article in the *New Republic* (October 17, 1988) Fred Barnes tells us what the result of that attitude can be: "In 1984 Baker [James Baker, Secretary of State designate] was boss of his first winning campaign, Reagan's reelection. . . . [H]e made a huge strategic mistake, putting on an issueless campaign that guaranteed a landslide. Reagan won forty-nine states, but no mandate. . . . (He) could have stumped for a spending reduction plan, military aid to the *contras*, social issues. He didn't."

A Reagan "programmed to say nothing," concludes Barnes, has had an aimless and scandal-scarred second term. Baker was not a professional handler but he was in their mold.

Our task is to return the control of the campaign to the candidates and force them to responsibility. One of the strongest tools in the handlers' trade is the use of spot TV and radio advertisements meant to sell the candidate or destroy his opponent. In the past two sessions of Congress, Senators Daniel Inouye, (D-Hawaii) and Warren Rudman, (R-Vt.), have pushed bills requiring a uniform-format regulation for political advertisements. They will undoubtedly do so again. The regulation would make it mandatory that every advertisement for a particular candidate would include the appearance or voice of the candidate himself (or herself) or of an identified spokesperson. The handler might not thus be eliminated, but he or she would be made more honest and careful. If each of us would join the organizations supporting this change in political advertising by making our interest known to our senators on a regular basis until this or similar legislation is passed, we will have had a very positive effect on the process—and one that costs us little effort.

We can also do something on an individual or collective basis to promote a real discussion of the issues by insisting that the campaign's modified press conferences be replaced by real one-on-one debates, once the primary season is over.

The debates are now in the hands of the two political parties. Hence, they are in the realm of our control. We can lay aside the lazy rationale to which too many of us subscribe—"I vote for the man, not the party"—and actively participate in a party in order to make our wishes known. We can write, and perhaps talk, directly to our local and national party leaders, urging direct debates and asking that prospective candidates be committed to a specified number *before* the nomination.

Handlers have, of course, aimed at the media and we cannot have such direct effect on the way in which the media has responded and turned attention away from the issues. The use of the sound bite and the photo opportunity has been an easy alternative to the reporting of substantive speeches. The temptation has been to cover campaigns in the same way the professional football season is covered. Fortunately, the media are in the process of self-examination. Many newspersons agree with Edwin Diamond of *New York* magazine (November 21, 1988) that too much coverage was stretched over too long a period of time, that the concentration was on the process rather than substance, and that there was an obsession with polls, many of them media-generated.

Even with the media, direct communication from interested individuals can bring results. Sponsors are still responsive to viewers and readers. We can urge the limitation of intensive national coverage to the campaign year itself—again by letter or petition—as one improvement. We can ask for a moratorium on polls until it is known whether they skew subsequent returns.

Following these suggestions does not require much effort. It does require resolution and the willingness to take one small step after the other. The way to real change is tedious and calls for persistence. □

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OF SEVERAL MINDS David R. Carlin, Jr.

THE FAILURE OF SUCCESS

POLITICS & THE TRUE SELF

Life, as everyone knows, takes strange twists and turns. Years ago I set out to become a scholar and academic. At the time I had an interest in politics, but it was the interest of a spectator, not a participant.

Years later I have turned out to be a bust at scholarship. I never completed my doctorate, and I've published only a handful of articles in scholarly journals. My teaching career carried me no further than a few small colleges before I settled down to earning an indifferent living at a state community college.

But I've turned out to be a success in politics—at least as these things are measured in Rhode Island. About a month ago, a few weeks after the November election, I was chosen majority leader of the Rhode Island Senate, the top post in that chamber. This makes me, after the governor and on a par with the speaker of the house, one of the three most influential elected officials in the state government. If your magnifying glass is not powerful enough to allow you to find Rhode Island on the map, you may think this is no big deal. It's a small state, true, but there are those who love it; and for those of us who think it is the center of the earth, being *numero uno* in its senate counts as having made it.

I'm pleased with my new-found eminence. But unfortunately for my peace of mind, I still consider the intellectual life superior to the political life (a conviction that results, no doubt, from my early Aristotelian training), so I consider my success to be a kind of failure. As I scurry along the corridors of power, I carry with me the secret shame of not having achieved my doctorate, of not having written any books, of not having won a university professorship.

Even in politics things didn't turn out the way I had expected. I began as a total outsider, a maverick, almost a malcontent; and I liked it that way. But look what's happened to me. A senate majority leader is the ultimate insider, the guy who wheels and deals behind closed doors in what used to be, before the anti-tobacco revolution, smoke-filled rooms. (To my regret, a number of my top lieutenants, otherwise fine people, are cigar smokers; so I actually do operate out of a room that is filled with smoke half the time. Considered from a physical point of view, it is of course disgusting; but regarded as a piece of nostalgia, it has its charm.)

My start in politics came with the Gene McCarthy-for-president campaign of 1968. At the time Rhode Island didn't hold presidential primaries, so we couldn't actually ask anyone to vote for McCarthy. We managed to keep busy nonetheless, so busy that we deluded ourselves into believing that our running around in circles constituted a valuable contribution to the cause. I don't think I did much to help McCarthy, but I did a lot to help myself become addicted to politics.

Later that year I ran for the state senate in a Democratic primary against a well-entrenched incumbent who had been in office for many years. I was so green politically that I didn't realize this sort of thing is almost impossible to pull off. I didn't make it to the legislature until twelve years later, on my fourth try, all of them against incumbents.

I have an eighteen-year-old son who is interested in politics. A few months ago, just before he went off to college for the first time, I took him aside and spoke with him, the way Polonius did with the departing Laertes, giving him in capsule form the substance of the wisdom I had gained from a lifetime of experience: "This above all: wait for an open seat."

My road to politics passed through the realm of theory as well as the realm of practice. The dissertation I never finished (at Notre Dame) had to do with the political theory of Jacques Maritain, the French Catholic philosopher who, more than any other writer, taught Catholicism how to speak the language of liberalism and human rights. My long study of Maritain left me marked for life, I'm sure, but it has never been clear to me how the lessons I learned from him could be applied to practical politics, at least at the level at which I play the game.

Maritain's two great books on politics are *Integral Humanism* (1936) and *Man and the State* (1951). *Integral Humanism* bears the strengths and limitations of the critical period in which it was written. Reduced to essentials, the question it poses is this: What kind of social-cultural revolution shall we have—a Communist-humanist revolution or a Christian-humanist revolution? It's quite a wonderful book, but it is difficult to see what guidance it can provide to an American politician living in an almost totally non-revolutionary society.

Man and the State, written at the midpoint of Maritain's twenty-year sojourn in the United States (not counting the time he spent as French ambassador to the Vatican in the late 1940s), is much closer to the mark. With its emphasis on natural law, it lies at the bottom, I suspect, of much of my dissatisfaction with the virtually antinomian basis of contemporary American liberalism. But satisfying though it may be theoretically, it provides little help in the burdensome business of day-to-day politics. (Then again, I suppose the typical pastor gets little light from the Bible on how to run his parish on a day-to-day basis.)

I sometimes have the feeling that the further I sink into politics the more alienated I become from my true self. I hope this is only a feeling, not a genuine insight, for in my new position I'll have to sink all the way to rock bottom. On the other hand, is there anyone who is not alienated, more or less, from his or her true self? Man is the animal who regrets his choices, no matter how well they may have been made. □

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'THIS MAN HAS EXPIRED'

WITNESS TO AN EXECUTION

ROBERT JOHNSON

The death penalty has made a comeback in recent years. In the late sixties and through most of the seventies, such a thing seemed impossible. There was a moratorium on executions in the U.S., backed by the authority of the Supreme Court. The hiatus lasted roughly a decade. Coming on the heels of a gradual but persistent decline in the use of the death penalty in the Western world, it appeared to some that executions would pass from the American scene [cf. *Commonweal*, January 15, 1988]. Nothing could have been further from the truth.

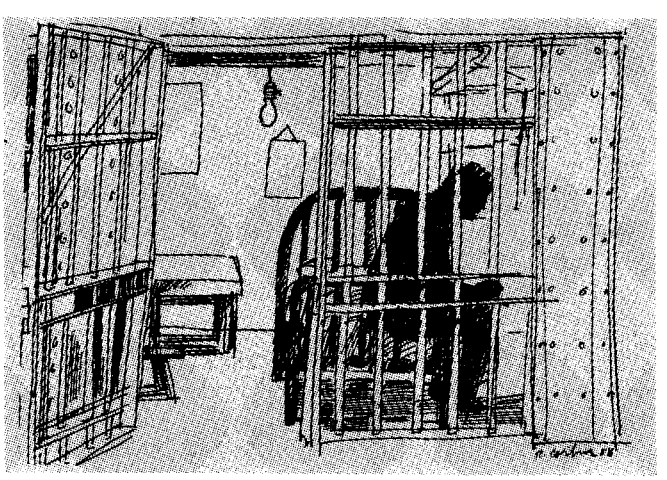
Beginning with the execution of Gary Gilmore in 1977, over 100 people have been put to death, most of them in the last few years. Some 2,200 prisoners are presently confined on death rows across the nation. The majority of these prisoners have lived under sentence of death for years, in some cases a decade or more, and are running out of legal appeals. It is fair to say that the death penalty is alive and well in America, and that executions will be with us for the foreseeable future.

Gilmore's execution marked the resurrection of the modern death penalty and was big news. It was commemorated in a best-selling tome by Norman Mailer, *The Executioner's Song*. The title was deceptive. Like others who have examined the death penalty, Mailer told us a great deal about the condemned but very little about the executioners. Indeed, if we dwell on Mailer's account, the executioner's story is not only unsung; it is distorted.

Gilmore's execution was quite atypical. His was an instance of state-assisted suicide accompanied by an element of romance and played out against a backdrop of media fanfare. Unrepentant and unafraid, Gilmore refused to appeal his conviction. He dared the state of Utah to take his life, and the media repeated the challenge until it became a taunt that may well have goaded officials to action. A failed suicide pact with his lover staged only days before the execution, using drugs she delivered to him in a visit marked by unusual intimacy, added a hint of melodrama to the proceedings. Gilmore's final words, "Let's do it," seemed to invite the lethal hail of bullets from the firing squad. The nonchalant phrase, at once fatalistic and brazenly rebellious, became Gilmore's epitaph. It clinched his outlaw-hero image, and found its way onto tee shirts that confirmed his celebrity status.

Befitting a celebrity, Gilmore was treated with unusual leniency by prison officials during his confinement on death row. He was, for example, allowed to hold a party the night before his execution, during which he was free to eat, drink, and make merry with his guests until the early morning hours. This is not entirely unprecedented. Notorious English convicts of centuries past would throw farewell balls in prison on the eve of their executions. News accounts of such affairs sometimes included a commentary on the richness of the table and the quality of the dancing. For the record, Gilmore served Tang, Kool-Aid, cookies, and coffee, later supplemented by contraband pizza and an unidentified liquor. Periodically, he gobbled drugs obligingly provided by the prison pharmacy. He played a modest arrangement of rock music albums but refrained from dancing.

Gilmore's execution generally, like his parting fete, was decidedly out of step with the tenor of the modern death penalty. Most condemned prisoners fight to save their lives,



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not to have them taken. They do not see their fate in romantic terms; there are no farewell parties. Nor are they given medication to ease their anxiety or win their compliance. The subjects of typical executions remain anonymous to the public and even to their keepers. They are very much alone at the end.

In contrast to Mailer's account, the focus of the research I have conducted is on the executioners themselves as they carry out typical executions. In my experience executioners—not unlike Mailer himself—can be quite voluble, and sometimes quite moving, in expressing themselves. I shall draw upon their words to describe the death work they carry out in our name.

DEATH WORK AND DEATH WORKERS

Executioners are not a popular subject of social research, let alone conversation at the dinner table or cocktail party. We simply don't give the subject much thought. When we think of executioners at all, the imagery runs to individual men of disreputable, or at least questionable, character who work stealthily behind the scenes to carry out their grim labors. We picture hooded men hiding in the shadow of the gallows, or anonymous figures lurking out of sight behind electric chairs, gas chambers, firing blinds, or, more recently, hospital gurneys. We wonder who would do such grisly work and how they sleep at night.

This image of the executioner as a sinister and often solitary character is today misleading. To be sure, a few states hire free-lance executioners and traffic in macabre theatrics. Executioners may be picked up under cover of darkness and some may still wear black hoods. But today, executions are generally the work of a highly disciplined and efficient team of correctional officers.

Broadly speaking, the execution process as it is now practiced starts with the prisoner's confinement on death row, an oppressive prison-within-a-prison where the condemned are housed, sometimes for years, awaiting execution. Death work gains momentum when an execution date draws near and the prisoner is moved to the death house, a short walk from the death chamber. Finally, the process culminates in the death watch, a twenty-four-hour period that ends when the prisoner has been executed.

This final period, the death watch, is generally undertaken by correctional officers who work as a team and report directly to the prison warden. The warden or his representative, in turn, must by law preside over the execution. In many states, it is a member of the death watch or execution team, acting under the warden's authority, who in fact plays the formal role of executioner. Though this officer may technically work alone, his teammates view the execution as a shared responsibility. As one officer on the death watch told me in no uncertain terms: "We all take part in it; we all play 100 percent in it, too. That takes the load off this one individual [who pulls the switch]." The formal executioner concurred. "Everyone on the team can do it, and nobody will tell you I did it. I know my team." I found nothing in my research to dispute these claims.

The officers of these death watch teams are our modern executioners. As part of a larger study of the death work process, I studied one such group. This team, comprised of nine seasoned officers of varying ranks, had carried out five electrocutions at the time I began my research. I interviewed each officer on the team after the fifth execution, then served as an official witness at a sixth electrocution. Later, I served as a behind-the-scenes observer during their seventh execution. The results of this phase of my research form the substance of this essay.

THE DEATH WATCH TEAM

The death watch or execution team members refer to themselves, with evident pride, as simply "the team." This pride is shared by other correctional officials. The warden at the institution I was observing praised members of the team as solid citizens—in his words, country boys. These country boys, he assured me, could be counted on to do the job and do it well. As a fellow administrator put it, "an execution is something [that] needs to be done and good people, dedicated people who believe in the American system, should do it. And there's a certain amount of feeling, probably one to another, that they're part of that—that when they have to hang tough, they can do it, and they can do it right. And that it's just the right thing to do."

The official view is that an execution is a job that has to be done, and done right. The death penalty is, after all, the law of the land. In this context, the phrase "done right" means that an execution should be a proper, professional, dignified undertaking. In the words of a prison administrator, "We had to be sure that we did it properly, professionally, and [that] we gave as much dignity to the person as we possibly could in the process....If you've gotta do it, it might just as well be done the way it's supposed to be done—without any sensation."

In the language of the prison officials, "proper" refers to procedures that go off smoothly; "professional" means without personal feelings that intrude on the procedures in any way. The desire for executions that take place "without any

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sensation'' no doubt refers to the absence of media sensationalism, particularly if there should be an embarrassing and undignified hitch in the procedures, for example, a prisoner who breaks down or becomes violent and must be forcibly placed in the electric chair as witnesses, some from the media, look on in horror. Still, I can't help but note that this may be a revealing slip of the tongue. For executions are indeed meant to go off without any human feeling, without any sensation. A profound absence of feeling would seem to capture the bureaucratic ideal embodied in the modern execution.

The view of executions held by the execution team members parallels that of correctional administrators but is somewhat more restrained. The officers of the team are closer to the killing and dying, and are less apt to wax abstract or eloquent in describing the process. Listen to one man's observations:

> It's a job. I don't take it personally. You know, I don't take it like I'm having a grudge against this person and this person has done something to me. I'm just carrying out a job, doing what I was asked to do....This man has been sentenced to death in the courts. This is the law and he broke this law, and he has to suffer the consequences. And one of the consequences is to put him to death.

I found that few members of the execution team support the death penalty outright or without reservation. Having seen executions close up, many of them have lingering doubts about the justice or wisdom of this sanction. As one officer put it:

> I'm not sure the death penalty is the right way. I don't know if there is a right answer. So I look at it like this: if it's gotta be done, at least it can be done in a humane way, if there is such a word for it....The only way it should be done, I feel, is the way we do it. It's done professionally; it's not no horseplaying. Everything is done by documentation. On time. By the book.

Arranging executions that occur ''without any sensation'' and that go ''by the book'' is no mean task, but it is a task that is undertaken in earnest by the execution team. The tone of the enterprise is set by the team leader, a man who takes a hard-boiled, no-nonsense approach to correctional work in general and death work in particular. ''My style,'' he says, ''is this: if it's a job to do, get it done. Do it and that's it.'' He seeks out kindred spirits, men who see killing condemned prisoners as a job—a dirty job one does reluctantly, perhaps, but above all a job one carries out dispassionately and in the line of duty.

To make sure that line of duty is a straight and accurate one, the death watch team has been carefully drilled by the team leader in the mechanics of execution. The process has been broken down into simple, discrete tasks and practiced repeatedly. The team leader describes the division of labor in the following exchange:

> The execution team is a nine-officer team and each one has certain things to do. When I would train you, maybe you'd buckle a belt, that might be all you'd have to do....And you'd be expected to do one thing and that's all you'd be expected to do. And if everybody does what they were taught, or what they were trained to do, at the end the man would be put in the chair and everything would be complete. It's all come together now.
>
> So it's broken down into very small steps....
>
> *Very small*, yes. Each person has *one* thing to do.
>
> I see. What's the purpose of breaking it down into such small steps?
>
> So people won't get confused. I've learned it's kind of a tense time. When you're executin' a person, killing a person—you call it killin', executin', whatever you want—the man dies anyway. I find the less you got on your mind, why, the better you'll carry it out. So it's just very simple things. And so far, you know, it's all come together, we haven't had any problems.

This division of labor allows each man on the execution team to become a specialist, a technician with a sense of pride in his work. Said one man,

> My assignment is the leg piece. Right leg. I roll his pants' leg up, place a piece [electrode] on his leg, strap his leg in....I've got all the moves down pat. We train from different posts; I can do any of them. But that's my main post.

The implication is not that the officers are incapable of performing multiple or complex tasks, but simply that it is more efficient to focus each officer's efforts on one easy task.

An essential part of the training is practice. Practice is meant to produce a confident group, capable of fast and accurate performance under pressure. The rewards of practice are reaped in improved performance. Executions take place with increasing efficiency, and eventually occur with precision. ''The first one was grisly,'' a team member confided to me. He explained that there was a certain amount of fumbling, which made the execution seem interminable. There were technical problems as well: The generator was set too high so the body was badly burned. But that is the past, the officer assured me. ''The ones now, we know what we're doing. It's just like clockwork.''

THE DEATH WATCH

The death-watch team is deployed during the last twenty-four hours before an execution. In the state under study, the death watch starts at 11 o'clock the night before the execution and ends at 11 o'clock the next night when the execution takes place. At least two officers would be with the prisoner at any given time during that period. Their objective is to keep the prisoner alive and ''on schedule.'' That is, to move him through a series of critical and cumulatively demoralizing junctures that begin with his last meal and end with his last walk. When the time comes, they must deliver the prisoner up for execution as quickly and unobtrusively as possible.

Broadly speaking, the job of the death watch officer, as one man put it, ''is to sit and keep the inmate calm for the last twenty-four hours—and get the man ready to go.'' Keeping a

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condemned prisoner calm means, in part, serving his immediate needs. It seems paradoxical to think of the death watch officers as providing services to the condemned, but the logistics of the job make service a central obligation of the officers. Here's how one officer made this point:

> Well, you can't help but be involved with many of the things that he's involved with. Because if he wants to make a call to his family, well, you'll have to dial the number. And you keep records of whatever calls he makes. If he wants a cigarette, well he's not allowed to keep matches so you light it for him. You've got to pour his coffee, too. So you're aware what he's doing. It's not like you can just ignore him. You've gotta just be with him whether he wants it or not, and cater to his needs.

Officers cater to the condemned because contented inmates are easier to keep under control. To a man, the officers say this is so. But one can never trust even a contented, condemned prisoner.

The death-watch officers see condemned prisoners as men with explosive personalities. "You don't know what, what a man's gonna do," noted one officer. "He's liable to snap, he's liable to pass out. We watch him all the time to prevent him from committing suicide. You've got to be ready— he's liable to do anything." The prisoner is never out of at least one officer's sight. Thus surveillance is constant, and control, for all intents and purposes, is total.

Relations between the officers and their charges during the death watch can be quite intense. Watching and being watched are central to this enterprise, and these are always engaging activities, particularly when the stakes are life and death. These relations are, nevertheless, utterly impersonal; there are no grudges but neither is there compassion or fellow-feeling. Officers are civil but cool; they keep an emotional distance from the men they are about to kill. To do otherwise, they maintain, would make it harder to execute condemned prisoners. The attitude of the officers is that the prisoners arrive as strangers and are easier to kill if they stay that way.

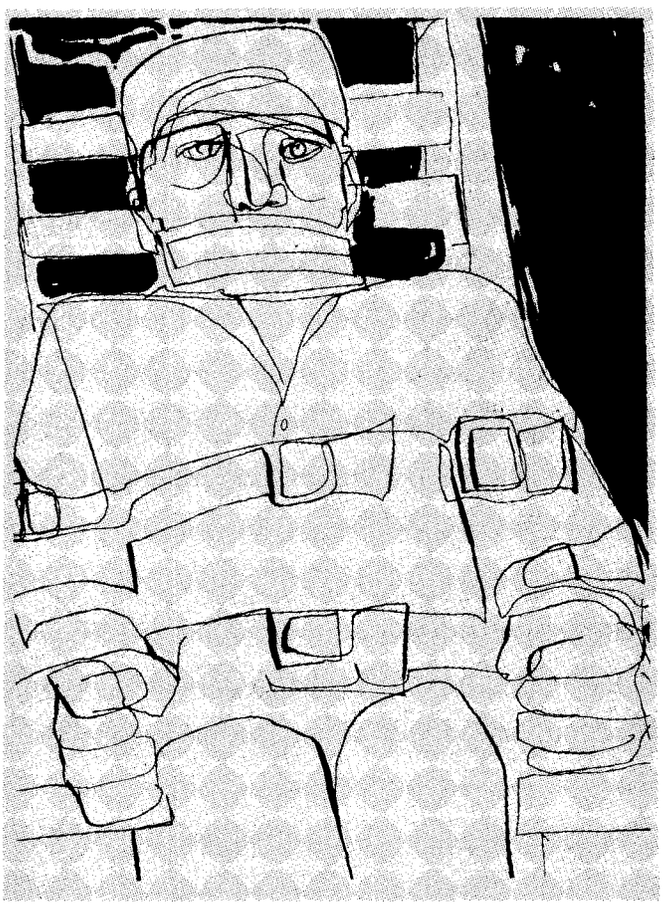
During the last five or six hours, two specific team officers are assigned to guard the prisoner. Unlike their more taciturn and aloof colleagues on earlier shifts, these officers make a conscious effort to talk with the prisoner. In one officer's words, "We just keep them right there and keep talking to them—about anything except the chair." The point of these conversations is not merely to pass time; it is to keep tabs on the prisoner's state of mind, and to steer him away from subjects that might depress, anger, or otherwise upset him. Sociability, in other words, quite explicitly serves as a source of social control. Relationships, such as they are, serve purely manipulative ends. This is impersonality at its worst, masquerading as concern for the strangers one hopes to execute with as little trouble as possible.

Generally speaking, as the execution moves closer, the mood becomes more somber and subdued. There is a last meal. Prisoners can order pretty much what they want, but most eat little or nothing at all. At this point, the prisoners may steadfastly maintain that their executions will be stayed. Such bravado is belied by their loss of appetite. "You can see them going down," said one officer. "Food is the last thing they got on their minds."

Next the prisoners must box their meager worldly goods. These are inventoried by the staff, recorded on a one-page checklist form, and marked for disposition to family or friends. Prisoners are visibly saddened, even moved to tears, by this procedure, which at once summarizes their lives and highlights the imminence of death. At this point, said one of the officers, "I really get into him; I watch him real close." The execution schedule, the officer pointed out, is "picking up momentum, and we don't want to lose control of the situation."

This momentum is not lost on the condemned prisoner. Critical milestones have been passed. The prisoner moves in a limbo existence devoid of food or possessions; he has seen the last of such things, unless he receives a stay of execution and rejoins the living. His identity is expropriated as well. The critical juncture in this regard is the shaving of the man's head (including facial hair) and right leg. Hair is shaved to facilitate the electrocution; it reduces physical resistance to electricity and minimizes singeing and burning. But the process has obvious psychological significance as well, adding greatly to the momentum of the execution.

The shaving procedure is quite public and intimidating. The



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condemned man is taken from his cell and seated in the middle of the tier. His hands and feet are cuffed, and he is dressed only in undershorts. The entire death watch team is assembled around him. They stay at a discrete distance, but it is obvious that they are there to maintain control should he resist in any way or make any untoward move. As a rule, the man is overwhelmed. As one officer told me in blunt terms, "Come eight o'clock, we've got a dead man. Eight o'clock is when we shave the man. We take his identity; it goes with the hair." This taking of identity is indeed a collective process—the team makes a forceful "we," the prisoner their helpless object. The staff is confident that the prisoner's capacity to resist is now compromised. What is left of the man erodes gradually and, according to the officers, perceptibly over the remaining three hours before the execution.

After the prisoner has been shaved, he is then made to shower and don a fresh set of clothes for the execution. The clothes are unremarkable in appearance, except that velcro replaces buttons and zippers, to reduce the chance of burning the body. The main significance of the clothes is symbolic: they mark the prisoner as a man who is ready for execution. Now physically "prepped," to quote one team member, the prisoner is placed in an empty tomblike cell, the death cell. All that is left is the wait. During this fateful period, the prisoner is more like an object "without any sensation" than like a flesh-and-blood person on the threshold of death.

For condemned prisoners, like Gilmore, who come to accept and even to relish their impending deaths, a genuine calm seems to prevail. It is as if they can transcend the dehumanizing forces at work around them and go to their deaths in peace. For most condemned prisoners, however, numb resignation rather than peaceful acceptance is the norm. By the accounts of the death-watch officers, these more typical prisoners are beaten men. Listen to the officers' accounts:

> A lot of 'em die in their minds before they go to that chair. I've never known of one or heard of one putting up a fight....By the time they walk to the chair, they've completely faced it. Such a reality most people can't understand. Cause they don't fight it. They don't seem to have anything to say. It's just something like "Get it over with." They may be numb, sort of in a trance.

> They go through stages. And, at this stage, they're real humble. Humblest bunch of people I ever seen. Most all of 'em is real, real weak. Most of the time you'd only need one or two people to carry out an execution, as weak and as humble as they are.

These men seem barely human and alive to their keepers. They wait meekly to be escorted to their deaths. The people who come for them are the warden and the remainder of the death watch team, flanked by high-ranking correctional officials. The warden reads the court order, known popularly as a death warrant. This is, as one officer said, "the real deal," and nobody misses its significance. The condemned prisoners then go to their deaths compliantly, captives of the inexorable, irresistible momentum of the situation. As one officer put it, "There's no struggle....They just walk right on in there." So too, do the staff "just walk right on in there," following a routine they have come to know well. Both the condemned and the executioners, it would seem, find a relief of sorts in mindless mechanical conformity to the modern execution drill.

WITNESS TO AN EXECUTION

As the team and administrators prepare to commence the good fight, as they might say, another group, the official witnesses, are also preparing themselves for their role in the execution. Numbering between six and twelve for any given execution, the official witnesses are disinterested citizens in good standing drawn from a cross-section of the state's population. If you will, they are every good or decent person, called upon to represent the community and use their good offices to testify to the propriety of the execution. I served as an official witness at the execution of an inmate.

At eight in the evening, about the time the prisoner is shaved in preparation for the execution, the witnesses are assembled. Eleven in all, we included three newspaper and two television reporters, a state trooper, two police officers, a magistrate, a businessman, and myself. We were picked up in the parking lot behind the main office of the corrections department. There was nothing unusual or even memorable about any of this. Gothic touches were notable by their absence. It wasn't a dark and stormy night; no one emerged from the shadows to lead us to the prison gates.

Mundane considerations prevailed. The van sent for us was missing a few rows of seats so there wasn't enough room for all of us. Obliging prison officials volunteered their cars. Our rather ordinary cavalcade reached the prison but only after getting lost. Once within the prison's walls, we were sequestered for some two hours in a bare and almost shabby administrative conference room. A public information officer was assigned to accompany us and answer our questions. We grilled this official about the prisoner and the execution procedure he would undergo shortly, but little information was to be had. The man confessed ignorance on the most basic points. Disgruntled at this and increasingly anxious, we made small talk and drank coffee.

At 10:40 P.M., roughly two-and-a-half hours after we were assembled and only twenty minutes before the execution was scheduled to occur, the witnesses were taken to the basement of the prison's administrative building, frisked, then led down an alleyway that ran along the exterior of the building. We entered a neighboring cell block and were admitted to a vestibule adjoining the death chamber. Each of us signed a log, and was then led off to the witness area. To our left, around a corner some thirty feet away, the prisoner sat in the condemned cell. He couldn't see us, but I'm quite certain he could hear us. It occurred to me that our arrival was a fateful re-

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minder for the prisoner. The next group would be led by the warden, and it would be coming for him.

We entered the witness area, a room within the death chamber, and took our seats. A picture window covering the front wall of the witness room offered a clear view of the electric chair, which was about twelve feet away from us and well illuminated. The chair, a large, high-back solid oak structure with imposing black straps, dominated the death chamber. Behind it, on the back wall, was an open panel full of coils and lights. Peeling paint hung from the ceiling and walls; water stains from persistent leaks were everywhere in evidence.

Two officers, one a hulking figure weighing some 400 pounds, stood alongside the electric chair. Each had his hands crossed at the lap and wore a forbidding, blank expression on his face. The witnesses gazed at them and the chair, most of us scribbling notes furiously. We did this, I suppose, as much to record the experience as to have a distraction from the growing tension. A correctional officer entered the witness room and announced that a trial run of the machinery would be undertaken. Seconds later, lights flashed on the control panel behind the chair indicating that the chair was in working order. A white curtain, opened for the test, separated the chair and the witness area. After the test, the curtain was drawn. More tests were performed behind the curtain. Afterwards, the curtain was reopened, and would be left open until the execution was over. Then it would be closed to allow the officers to remove the body.

A handful of high-level correctional officials were present in the death chamber, standing just outside the witness area. There were two regional administrators, the director of the Department of Corrections, and the prison warden. The prisoner's chaplain and lawyer were also present. Other than the chaplain's black religious garb, subdued grey pinstripes and bland correctional uniforms prevailed. All parties were quite solemn.

At 10:58 the prisoner entered the death chamber. He was, I knew from my research, a man with a checkered, tragic past. He had been grossly abused as a child, and went on to become grossly abusive of others. I was told he could not describe his life, from childhood on, without talking about confrontations in defense of a precarious sense of self—at home, in school, on the streets, in the prison yard. Belittled by life and choking with rage, he was hungry to be noticed. Paradoxically, he had found his moment in the spotlight, but it was a dim and unflattering light cast before a small and unappreciative audience. "He'd pose for cameras in the chair—for the attention," his counselor had told me earlier in the day. But the truth was that the prisoner wasn't smiling, and there were no cameras.

The prisoner walked quickly and silently toward the chair, an escort of officers in tow. His eyes were turned downward, his expression a bit glazed. Like many before him, the prisoner had threatened to stage a last stand. But that was lifetimes ago, on death row. In the death house, he joined the humble bunch and kept to the executioner's schedule. He appeared to have given up on life before he died in the chair.

En route to the chair, the prisoner stumbled slightly, as if the momentum of the event had overtaken him. Were he not held securely by two officers, one at each elbow, he might have fallen. Were the routine to be broken in this or indeed any other way, the officers believe, the prisoner might faint or panic or become violent, and have to be forcibly placed in the chair. Perhaps as a precaution, when the prisoner reached the chair he did not turn on his own but rather was turned, firmly but without malice, by the officers in his escort. These included the two men at his elbows, and four others who followed behind him. Once the prisoner was seated, again with help, the officers strapped him into the chair.

The execution team worked with machine precision. Like a disciplined swarm, they enveloped him. Arms, legs, stomach, chest, and head were secured in a matter of seconds. Electrodes were attached to the cap holding his head and to the strap holding his exposed right leg. A leather mask was placed over his face. The last officer mopped the prisoner's brow, then touched his hand in a gesture of farewell.

During the brief procession to the electric chair, the prisoner was attended by a chaplain. As the execution team worked feverishly to secure the condemned man's body, the chaplain, who appeared to be upset, leaned over him and placed his forehead in contact with the prisoner's, whispering urgently. The priest might have been praying, but I had the impression he was consoling the man, perhaps assuring him that a forgiving God awaited him in the next life. If he heard the chaplain, I doubt the man comprehended his message. He didn't seem comforted. Rather, he looked stricken and appeared to be in shock. Perhaps the priest's urgent ministrations betrayed his doubts that the prisoner could hold himself together. The chaplain then withdrew at the warden's request, allowing the officers to affix the death mask.

The strapped and masked figure sat before us, utterly alone, waiting to be killed. The cap and mask dominated his face. The cap was nothing more than a sponge encased in a leather shell with a metal piece at the top to accept an electrode. It looked decrepit and resembled a cheap, ill-fitting toupee. The mask, made entirely of leather, appeared soiled and worn. It had two parts. The bottom part covered the chin and mouth, the top the eyes and lower forehead. Only the nose was exposed. The effect of a rigidly restrained body, together with the bizarre cap and the protruding nose, was nothing short of grotesque. A faceless man breathed before us in a tragicomic trance, waiting for a blast of electricity that would extinguish his life. Endless seconds passed. His last act was to swallow, nervously, pathetically, with his Adam's apple bobbing. I was struck by that simple movement then, and can't forget it even now. It told me, as nothing else did, that in the prisoner's restrained body, behind that mask, lurked a fellow human being who, at some level, however primitive, knew or sensed himself to be moments from death.

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The condemned man sat perfectly still for what seemed an eternity but was in fact no more than thirty seconds. Finally the electricity hit him. His body stiffened spasmodically, though only briefly. A thin swirl of smoke trailed away from his head and then dissipated quickly. The body remained taut, with the right foot raised slightly at the heel, seemingly frozen there. A brief pause, then another minute of shock. When it was over, the body was flaccid and inert.

Three minutes passed while the officials let the body cool. (Immediately after the execution, I'm told, the body would be too hot to touch and would blister anyone who did.) All eyes were riveted to the chair; I felt trapped in my witness seat, at once transfixed and yet eager for release. I can't recall any clear thoughts from that moment. One of the death watch officers later volunteered that he shared this experience of staring blankly at the execution scene. Had the prisoner's mind been mercifully blank before the end? I hoped so.

An officer walked up to the body, opened the shirt at chest level, then continued on to get the physician from an adjoining room. The physician listened for a heartbeat. Hearing none, he turned to the warden and said, "This man has expired." The warden, speaking to the director, solemnly intoned: "Mr. Director, the court order has been fulfilled." The curtain was then drawn and the witnesses filed out.

THE MORNING AFTER

As the team prepared the body for the morgue, the witnesses were led to the front door of the prison. On the way, we passed a number of cell blocks. We could hear the normal sounds of prison life, including the occasional catcall and lewd comment hurled at uninvited guests like ourselves. But no trouble came in the wake of the execution. Small protests were going on outside the walls, we were told, but we could not hear them. Soon the media would be gone; the protestors would disperse and head for their homes. The prisoners, already home, had been indifferent to the proceedings, as they always are unless the condemned prisoner had been a figure of some consequence in the convict community. Then there might be tension and maybe even a modest disturbance on a prison tier or two. But few convict luminaries are executed, and the dead man had not been one of them. Our escort officer offered a sad tribute to the prisoner: "The inmates, they didn't care about this guy."

I couldn't help but think they weren't alone in this. The executioners went home and set about their lives. Having taken life, they would savor a bit of life themselves. They showered, ate, made love, slept, then took a day or two off. For some, the prisoner's image would linger for that night. The men who strapped him in remembered what it was like to touch him; they showered as soon as they got home to wash off the feel and smell of death. One official sat up picturing how the prisoner looked at the end. (I had a few drinks myself that night with that same image for company.) There was some talk about delayed reactions to the stress of carrying out executions. Though such concerns seemed remote that evening, I learned later that problems would surface for some of the officers. But no one on the team, then or later, was haunted by the executed man's memory, nor would anyone grieve for him. "When I go home after one of these things," said one man, "I sleep like a rock." His may or may not be the sleep of the just, but one can only marvel at such a thing, and perhaps envy such a man. □

William Pitt Root

With No Other Witness

for Yannis Ritsos

"before any charge of atrocity will warrant investigation, there must be a second witness."

Amnesty International

In Greece I met a man who wrote for years
in exile on an island, wrote with no other witness
than sea-wind and the ranked blue waves,
wrote on the tiny scraps got from skinning cigarettes
—hiding the rolled-up poems in his trouser cuffs,
permitting guards to believe his pen
was for finding faces in the stones
and drawing them out, feature by feature,
as gifts for the villagers, for guards
to give to their local sweethearts.
Handing out
those cigarettes to that solitary figure,
watching him sit all those years among stones
the generous sea would present to him,
while he labored tirelessly with his gifts,
Harmless enough, they must have supposed,
with all the Aegean for his audience!

For his tutor, is more like it. For the sea
is full of surprises—deaf shells
charged with endless whispering,
fishes that fly,
storms out of nowhere, dolphins that sing.
A decade later, free, still within
earshot of the faithful ocean, he gestures
to his study shelves, pointing
with a cigarette, "On stones I found stone faces,
but my passions were unmasked
in poems now read in forty-seven tongues."
Nor, he adds, smiling,
eyes still shining, 72, have the sweethearts
in the villages forgotten him.
Guards, beware
of gentlemen when stones return their gaze.

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WHAT LIBERALS HAVEN'T LEARNED & WHY

THE ELECTION THAT TURNED SOUR

FRED SIEGEL

Just a short six months ago it looked as though the L-word, the politics that dare not speak its name, was back. While an aging Ronald Reagan, who seemed to have finally failed his luck, was losing popular support, the homeless crisis once again made compassion common sense. Congressional liberals seized the agenda with much needed long-term health care and plant-closing legislation. Meanwhile, the Republicans were trapped on a treadmill of free-market abstractions. Workers displaced by foreign competition were told to be patient and wait until the market equilibrium was restored. Even Reagan's success in curbing inflation undermined the Republicans by restoring some confidence in government so that it was harder and harder to conjure up the Ghost of Failed-Big-Government Past.

This was how the world looked when a euphoric Democratic party stood at its July 1988 national convention and mocked George Bush, a candidate actively disliked by 40 percent of the American electorate. Four months later George Bush was still actively disliked by 40 percent of the electorate but he was also president-elect. The Democratic party had lost to a man of whom it was said: "If the Democrats can't beat George Bush, they ought to find another country." What happened? How did the Republicans turn the election into a referendum on legalitarian liberalism? What went wrong? The obvious answer is Michael Dukakis. The problem is that the obvious answer is at least half wrong.

"Events," said the acerbic Karl Kraus, "enter the world as journalistic clichés." The danger for the Democrats is that they will believe the cliché—"it was simply Dukakis's fault"—which has come to define the election. Dukakis was surely a flawed candidate, but much of the advice handed out by both friendly TV journalists and Democratic party politicians was flawed too. The fact is they had good cause to be embarrassed, and not just by the defeat, since virtually all of Dukakis's weaknesses they pointed to in the post-mortems were ones they had earlier identified as sources of strength. The man who from March to July was praised for representing the kind of low-keyed alternative likely to appeal to a risk-adverse electorate was lambasted in October for his lack of boldness.

Sometimes the same anecdotes that had been used in the primaries to describe the governor's virtues were refurbished as examples of his vices in November. Impressed by his measured response to a third-place finish in Iowa, the media talked of the imperturbable "cool-hand Duke" and his long-range plans for victory. Implored to go negative against Gephardt for the upcoming New Hampshire contest, he refused, telling his advisers, "I am what I am." After November 8, however, that same "I am what I am" statement was dredged up to prove that an inflexible Dukakis had been unfit all along.

Dukakis, the candidate of competence, gave the party exactly what it thought it wanted and needed. And if anyone among rival Democrats (the unelectable Jesse Jackson excepted) or the liberal media thought otherwise, they kept it largely to themselves till well after the triumphant Democratic convention. Seasoned observers pronounced Dukakis a "formidable" candidate. Tom Hayden caught the tenor of the optimism when he expressed his "relief" at "the Duke's" selection. Dukakis, said Hayden, was a winner, "a button-down Democrat, a tough administrator...a Democrat who is efficient," in short "not the New Deal."

The problem is that even a new breed "tough administrator" isn't as likely to be in tune with the popular pulse as the businessmen who run the Republican party. Businessmen may be self-consciously part of an elite, but they make a career of both responding to and engineering shifts in popular taste. Old-time Democratic pols who made a living off politics were similarly attuned. But the lawyers and legal academics who dominated the Dukakis campaign come from a very different mold. Success in their circles derives from the degree to which they are insulated from popular pressures. In fact, among the legal academics, prestige accrues to those who are best able to change public policy by using the courts to bypass public opinion altogether. Or in the

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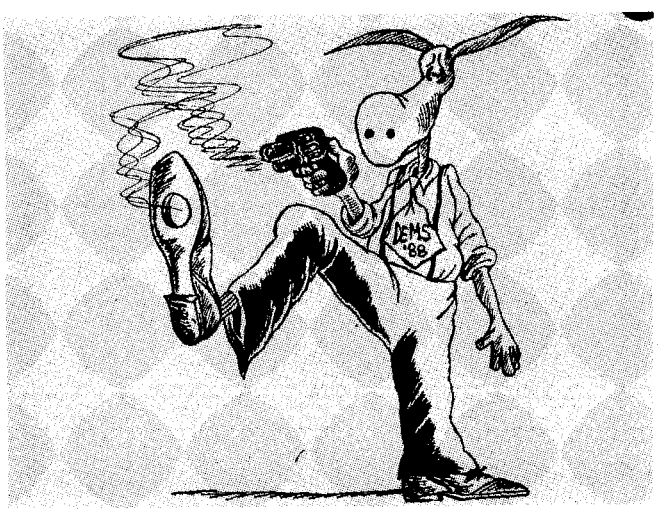
words of Dukakis campaign chief Susan Estrich, faced with the Pledge of Allegiance issue, "If Bush thinks he's going to get anywhere with this pledge stuff, he's crazy. We've got this Supreme Court decision."

Harvard Law's Estrich wasn't alone in being blind to the pledge issue. The Democrats in July were almost giddy with overconfidence. Pumped up by the success of their own convention and convinced in their own hearts that they were still the natural majority party, they underestimated George Bush. The conventional wisdom assumed that Bush, already an unpopular figure, couldn't afford to go negative because, in the words of Democratic media consultant Jim Buckley, "he can't go after Dukakis and look small." Secondly, when the attacks began they were quite reasonably seen as an example of Republican bankruptcy. The Republicans had run out of "new ideas," so the argument went, and were reduced to desperation tactics. No one among the Democrats, and least of all the network reporters, thought at the time that Bush could attack effectively.

Finally and most importantly, the consensus that the social issues had lost their bite was only half right. The fires of resentment the social issues once fueled have, it is true, died down. But as anyone who has attended a neighborhood meeting on crime can tell you, their embers, the coals of cynicism, emit a steady glow. George Bush fanned those embers and there was little Michael Dukakis or any other Democratic candidate could have done to put them out. When government is widely understood to have failed in its primary task, the protection of public safety, it is unlikely to be fully trusted with additional responsibilities.

Liberalism has a proud history of defending individual rights. The breadth of religious and personal freedom we now enjoy is an expression of its successful struggles. And when, as in the Bork hearings, liberalism is seen as still further expanding personal freedom without substantial social cost, it remains immensely popular.

But liberalism, wrapped as it is in the defense of personal autonomy, is unable to speak to the social breakdown which



increasingly plagues us. It is mute before abuses of liberty. If liberalism seems irredeemably tarnished with the brush of permissiveness on the crime issue, it is less a matter of what a particular candidate says and more a reflection of the numerous moral dramas inspired by fears of social disintegration which have been acted out across America.

Take, for example, the impact of a recent dispute in Cleveland between Carl Stokes, the nation's first black mayor of a major city and now a municipal judge, and the legalitarian liberals of the Legal Aid Society. Stokes has set off a storm by asking that the Legal Aid Society, which is funded by the city to represent indigent clients, be barred from continuing to represent a Ms. Donna Leisinger. Ms. Leisinger is the city's most active prostitute with over 150 arrests and 114 warrants for soliciting rides in the past year alone. First off, said Stokes, Ms. Leisinger, who admitted to an income of $25,000, was far from indigent. But more importantly, the taxpayers, Stokes argued, shouldn't have to subsidize "an illegal activity that helps make slums of our neighborhoods."

Legal Aid replied with a statement of the principled ignorance which has done so much to discredit liberalism. "I don't think anyone's criminal record," said a Legal Aid spokesman, "has anything to do with their guilt or innocence in connection with a new charge." Anyone's? Not anything? A "new charge" after the 151st time? In effect, the procedural purity of legalitarian liberalism insures that the past be seen to have no pattern, let alone meaning. And if the citizens of the city suffer as a consequence of that legal nihilism, well, that's just the price that the public has to pay for civil liberties. Can anyone actually live in this moral vacuum? Does anyone assume for a moment that these same lawyers would apply the same standards to their own lives? You can be sure that, hypocritically or not, they will be quite concerned with the past history of the people they hire as babysitters.

The Stokes/Legal Aid exchange describes much more than the way the law, once the cornerstone of ordered liberty, has been trivialized, turned into a game for lawyers. It points to the decisive break between New Deal liberalism, whose mild economic egalitarianism was based on a sense of shared values, and the moral relativism of post-New Deal lifestyle liberalism which is grounded in individually held rights. Those assertions of rights which serve to trump the claims of a common morality make it difficult and often impossible for cultural liberals to pass judgment on even the most obviously destructive behavior. It's now forgotten but recreational drug use was for many years defended as a "victimless crime." And to suggest even mild pressures to curb, say the suicide lyrics of some rock groups is, as Tipper Gore found out in the campaign, to invite charges of McCarthyism.

Contemporary liberalism leaves many Americans bewildered. It sends out a series of contradictory messages. On the one hand it trumpets a "do your own thing" moral free market and then turns around and calls upon people to pull together in shared pursuit of common social and economic goals. It extols all forms of individual expression, no matter how misplaced, including, for example, the wearing of "Fuck-You" teeshirts

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in schools and the fight for the rights of Detroit Tiger fans to shout obscenities as long and loud as they like. At the same time it refuses to countenance any expression of common or public sentiments. It has redefined civic rituals like the Pledge of Allegiance, written by a reformist socialist as an expression of mutuality, as a dangerous infringement on individual liberty. The upshot, as Michael Walzer has explained, is that "Liberalism...offers...few emotional rewards. It is not a home for its citizens."

The personality of Michael Dukakis is an almost perfect expression of the emotional hole at the core of contemporary liberalism. Like the great nineteenth-century rationalist, John Stuart Mill, who has been described as "the patron saint of the ACLU," Dukakis seemed to have to think his way to feelings. Dukakis has been blasted, and rightly so, for walking away from his own liberal heritage. This was foolish because insofar as liberalism has been increasingly defined in the public mind in cultural rather than economic terms, Dukakis was indelibly marked with the liberal label. Not surprisingly, after defining himself as a "card-carrying member of the ACLU," the voters he won in the Iowa caucuses were disproportionately more likely to call themselves liberal than those Democrats who voted for other candidates such as Gephardt and Simon.

Dukakis would have helped himself if he had openly and imaginatively embraced liberalism. He could have trumpeted what is truly a great history of struggles for social and economic justice, and thus partly redefined the terms of the debate. But the cowardice was not Dukakis's alone. "The L-word," noted Fred Barnes, "was all but banned from the Democratic convention." Even Ted Kennedy shied away from it, and when Jesse Jackson did use the L-word, the reference was pejorative. "The word liberal is a killer," said Dan McClung, a Lloyd Bentsen adviser. The Democrats, he went on, "have finally learned that you can be a liberal, but you can't say you're a liberal."

This was more than just a good intuition on McClung's part. The cumulative consequence of thousands of disputes like the one I just described in Cleveland has, as public opinion polls make clear, been to fritter away liberalism's accumulated moral capital. Liberals were outraged because Bush campaigned on what were described as "peripheral issues." But liberalism has self-destructed in part on "peripheral issues" like school prayer and constitutionalized as opposed to legislated abortion. Nor are legalitarian issues "peripheral" as Lars-Erik Nelson points out hyperbolically, to the family that has to spend money "to avoid the drug-dealers who cannot be jailed for more than twenty minutes at a time." It becomes a bread-and-butter issue, he argues, when a family has to spend money on private schools to spare its children "from public schools that cannot expel troublemakers or fire incompetent teachers." The upshot is that only 15 percent of all Americans now describe themselves as liberal, about half the number of those who call themselves conservative. In fact, liberalism's reputation outside the universities and the social service agencies is so bad that a friend was recently startled by the following exchange. My friend, a political activist, who was handing out palm cards for Dukakis and local liberal candidates, struck up a conversation with a middle-class voter. After talking for a few minutes the voter asked my friend if he were a liberal. "No," my friend replied, "I'm a democratic socialist." "That's okay," the fellow responded, "just as long as you're not one of those God-damned liberals."

All well and good, you say, but couldn't another more eloquent candidate have surmounted these difficulties? Couldn't Cuomo have brought the party together under the liberal banner? Not likely. Governing on the state level, Cuomo has largely sidestepped the kind of divisive issues he would have had to face head-on in a national campaign. No matter which way he turned, presidential candidate Cuomo too would have been caught up in the civil rights/civil liberties minefield.

Only after the election was it permissible to discuss openly the deep racial divisions which dog the Democrats. Analysts expressed surprise when they noted that on a state-by-state basis the swing to the Democrats was almost always inversely correlated with the size of the black population. But the racial caesura was there to disrupt the Dukakis campaign in September and October, even if it hadn't yet been given official status. Jesse Jackson has been rightfully credited with running a far more biracial campaign than he did in 1984. But biracialism has little chance presidentially unless it speaks directly about the underclass, because the fear that the underclass evokes speaks directly to millions of voters.

The Jackson Democrats are animated, much as were the Goldwater Republicans, by an almost mystical quest for electoral treasure in the form of a vast cache of hidden votes which, if only they could be found, would ensure political happiness forever after. Their quest is an elaborate end run around the problems of social disintegration now inextricably associated with liberalism. Like the Brecht poem about the East Berlin uprising, the theorists of the Rainbow want to dismiss the electorate and appoint a new one.

For the Rainbow, the hidden voters are the minority and nonminority poor supposedly ignored by the Democrats. The problem is that this really is a fairy tale. Jackson pulled in very few new voters this time around. Only 2 percent of the primary participants hadn't voted before, and 90 percent of the Jackson voters in the big industrial states had voted in 1984. In fact, despite Jackson's presence and populist appeal there was a disturbing drop in primary voter turnout among those who made less than the median income. The turnout of voters making less than $35,000 a year dropped 21 points in Illinois, 20 in Massachusetts, and 19 in New York between 1984 and 1988.

Critics of the Rainbow approach have argued that nonvoters weren't all that different from voters, but that since a higher income correlates positively with a higher likelihood of voting, an increase in turnout would produce some marginal gains for the Democrats. But even this seems doubtful in light of a

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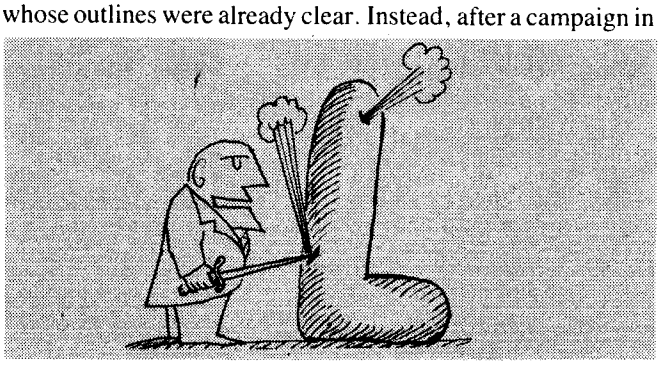
survey of 1988 nonvoters conducted by the *New York Times* and CBS. The survey found that Bush, who won by 8 points, would have won by 11 if everyone eligible had voted. The nonvoters, most of whom were young, poorly educated, footloose whites, favored Bush far more heavily than did the rest of the electorate.

The hard reality is that in the postwar era the Democrats have won not by drawing in new voters but by bringing back voters who had turned to the Republicans. A major difference between Stevenson's loss in 1956 and Kennedy's victory in 1960 is that while Stevenson won a little more than half of all Catholic voters, Kennedy won four out of five. Similarly, while McGovern cadged only one of five white Protestants in 1972, the victorious Carter won half of those votes. Jackson's appeal, by contrast, is to black voters who are not only one-third the size of the Catholic vote but who are already very heavily Democratic. If, as Mark Shields points out, Jackson could increase black turnout by an incredible 20 percent and win every black vote, that would add only two points to the Democratic party's total.

Jackson hurt the Democrats and his own claims to be not just a protest candidate by refusing to bow out of the primaries when it was clear that he had lost in eight consecutive states. His persistence, possibly as late as the Ohio primary in early May, served the Democrats well since it framed Dukakis as a flaming moderate. But beginning with the month between the Ohio and the June 7 California and New Jersey primaries, Jackson's campaign began to have a devastating effect on his own party. By continuing to campaign after he was decisively defeated, Jackson created an undertow that dragged Dukakis away from his impending clash with George Bush.

Marvin Wattenberg, surveying the Democrats' long history of destructive primary clashes, predicted a 53-47 Bush victory, even as Dukakis was riding high. He explained that in the postwar era the longer a party's primary fight the weaker it was likely to be in the general election. In 1980 and 1984 Carter and Mondale, each faced with tough primary fights, were running far stronger in April than their eventual finish in November. Therefore, argued Wattenberg, Dukakis should be spared some of the blame for what was an inevitable defeat.

Had Jackson's ego allowed him to withdraw after repeated defeats and had both Dukakis and Bush stood unopposed in the California primary, not only would Dukakis have had far more time to reorient himself for the general election, he would have had, in effect, a practice run against the Republican assaults whose outlines were already clear. Instead, after a campaign in which the Democrats refused to raise against each other the type of issues they would have to face in the general election, Dukakis was forced to give further attention to Jackson's seemingly insatiable drive for self-promotion.



All this is not to suggest that Dukakis was not a flawed candidate. The governor came off at times as more of a Brahmin than Bush. In the now famous interview with Ted Koppel where Dukakis self-destructed on national television, the Massachusetts governor seemed to say that while he couldn't tell the audience what contemporary liberalism was, he ought to win nonetheless on superior "form." Bush by contrast worked hard at being "jes folks." He constantly reminded us that while Dukakis stayed behind in New England, he had, in classic frontier fashion, "lit out for the territories" to prospect for oil. Lloyd Bentsen, a Tory Democrat, came off as far more of a "man of the people" simply by speaking in the vernacular of Texas politics.

But whatever his weakness, the Dukakis disaster was far more than the failure of one individual. Dukakis, the premier process liberal, was the product of a party that has been preoccupied for two decades with procedural reform. Dukakis won because, like McGovern, Carter, and Mondale before him, he mastered the process. While Gephardt and Simon placed all their hopes on Iowa, Dukakis understood that the first primary was financial and not electoral. In what was perhaps the most crucial contest of the campaign, he out-organized his rivals and won the crucial Hollywood "primary" for the big money contributors needed to run a marathon.

The post-1968 rules eliminating winner-take-all primaries don't require a candidate to put together a broad biracial coalition. Instead they place a premium on the sort of narrowly targeted campaigns, which both Dukakis and Jackson ran, that succeed by doing the best job of mobilizing their potential core supporters. Jackson, for instance, increased his strength from '84 not so much by increasing his support among white voters as by incorporating the black voters who had supported Mondale.

Dukakis survived Super-Tuesday by focusing on Catholic voters in a few key Southern states. In Florida, where Dukakis won, he and Jackson combined for 61 percent of the primary vote consisting largely of Catholic, Jewish, and black voters. In the general election, however, Bush won, also with 61 percent, largely by garnering the white Protestant voters Dukakis had been able to ignore in the primaries.

The endless search for the perfected process—the Democrats have been faithfully revising their rules every four years since 1968—is, like Jackson's hope for a different electorate, a great evasion. It's a means of avoiding a consensus on at least a core of substantive issues. In that sense the Democratic party's proceduralism is a faithful reflection of contemporary liberalism's unwillingness to pass judgment on what is or isn't good. Instead, responsibility is turned over to a system, a process. "If the system is fair, or so goes the assumption, all must

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submit to it, though the product itself looks distinctly fishy." A puzzled George McGovern captured this problem in a comment he made shortly after his devastating 1972 defeat. The Democrats, he said, had tried to open their "house" to as many new people as possible, but the voters had jumped out of almost every available window.

Let me give Hubert Humphrey the last word on Dukakis and the Democrats' failure to build a post-New Deal presidential politics. In 1975 Humphrey was told that his brand of liberalism had been criticized as passé by the newly elected governor of Massachusetts, Michael Dukakis. The last Democratic nominee who could be called a regular guy replied: "You know there are two kinds of liberals. Dukakis is a process liberal, and I'm not. All he cares is that the pipeline is neat and shiny and clean. He doesn't care if shit comes out the other end. But me, I don't care if the pipeline is cracked and rusty and shitty so long as the right results come out the other end. That's the difference between us."

How right you were, Hubert! □

SCREEN

IN THE LINE OF FIRE

'MISSISSIPPI' & 'TALK RADIO'

Mississippi Burning starts with a spooky, terrifying sequence: three young civil rights workers disappear one summer night in 1964. The three—Michael Schwerner, James Chaney, and Andrew Goodman—were seen in Mississippi as "outside agitators looking for trouble."

No region can be smug about racism, but Mississippi in 1964 was especially bad. The scenes from that time, included here, show fire bombings, barn burnings, lynchings, stories or threats of castration. And they are based on fact: thirty-one black churches were firebombed in '64 alone. The title, "Mississippi Burning," was initially the name of the FBI file on those events. Despite some flaws, the film has the strength of harsh honesty about this racist hatred. It's not pretty, but it is potent.

Some in the audience today, of course, will know the actual story of the missing civil rights workers; others may be too young. Director Alan Parker creates suspense for both groups by focusing not on the young civil rights workers, but on a fictional FBI team trying to solve their disappearance. The screenplay by Chris Gerolmo is part fact and fiction, "who-dun-it" and "how-will-they-solve-it." Both parts work well, despite overstatement in the fictional portions.

The FBI team pairs Willem Dafoe and Gene Hackman. Dafoe plays a clean-cut, methodical, Kennedyesque special agent—about as close as any FBI man could get to the New Frontier. He has, he explains, "full powers" to get to the bottom of the case, although the exact nature of his support from Washington is never made clear. Dafoe is good at playing idealists (Sergeant Elias in *Platoon*, Jesus in *The Last Temptation*). His bright eyes and taut face always suggest someone about to burst—an impression strengthened here by his tight, narrow, slightly nerdy sixties' suit.

Hackman has the more winning part as a former southern sheriff, a drawling "good ole boy," who is ambivalent about racism, but knows a thing or two about how to deal with the Klan. Sometimes too much of the film depicts the odd-couple nature of Dafoe and Hackman: they fight about police methods, then have to make up in order to find common ground. In short, the film blends the stuff of social protest and the Hollywood "buddy film" now standard fare for police-action dramas. Luckily, the driven Dafoe and Hackman, an actor's actor, are there to redeem the formulas. The terse beginning and tight editing throughout also keep the tone refreshingly somber.

Supporting actors are strong, with the roles of local law officers and Klan bullies well-played. Much of the film's power lies in catching their fanaticism, especially that of a deputy sheriff (Brad Dourif). Frances McDormand, as the sheriff's wife, is especally good, but would that her most important line—the breakthrough in the case—had been cut in half!

Besides overstatement and the burdens of the buddy genre, the film has other problems: no black figure becomes recognizable or important. Moreover, Parker underemphasizes the point that the villains could never be convicted in state courts, and got abbreviated sentences in the federal. Still, his power to recreate atmosphere and tension is remarkable. The set—an old backwater town, half-dust and half-swamp, with its shantytown black ghettos under constant threat—conjures up an American version of hell. The depictions of Klan violence will upset many.

Parker moves his film into the present with the last image: a shot of Chaney's vandalized gravestone with only its bottom half ("...1964 Not Forgotten") readable. "Not forgotten," true; but as Parker implies, not always remembered clearly either. *Mississippi Burning* is history with a contemporary bite.

Talk Radio portrays a hot topic to cold effect. Starring Eric Bogosian, it fuses his offbeat play of the same title with the story of Alan Berg, the Denver talk-show host killed by neo-Nazis. Bogosian plays a fictional Dallas talk-show host, Barry Champlain. At one point, defending the angry, compulsive way he provokes the racists and other kooks who call him up, Bogosian says, "my greatest fear is being boring." Alas, the film is.

Oliver Stone directed *Talk Radio*, and (as in his *Platoon* and *Wall Street*) co-wrote the screenplay. Again, Stone aims at ugly social realism, no holds barred, for purposes of moral satire. If anyone is innocent of radio talk shows, just multiply the vulgarity, rudeness, and vicarious wickedness of the new

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"tabloid television" tenfold. Such talk shows are festivals of exchanged cruelties, with host and call-in guests exchanging racial and sexual insults, discussing without an iota of taste every kind of social and psychological problem. A satire—even a hard-edged one on the addictive effects of such shows—would be welcome.

Stone's strength is satire. In *Talk Radio* he almost turns out a real novelty: a meditation on the value of restraint. But the film is too restrained on one level, too overstated on another. Despite moments of chilling power in calls from crazed callers, it leaves no resonance.

The film never outgrows its roots as a one-man play. Motion is not only in short supply; drama is, too. Plot in *Talk Radio* involves repetitive squabbles between Bogosian and his boss about broadcast standards, and with his wife and girlfriend about his emotional compulsions. The film is almost entirely set inside a studio: Stone uses a moving camera to compensate for the static feel, and sends Bogosian stalking around the studio talking through his headset. But there is no motion inside Bogosian; it's not only a one-man, but a one-note show, and the note is depressing. His climactic, bulging-eyes scene on the state of the cosmos is particularly lifeless. Little develops—except a violent act in the last moment, which comes as no surprise.

TOM O'BRIEN

STAGE

COUNTING LOSSES

MILNER'S 'CHECKMATES'

Don Milner's *Checkmates* seems too bland a play to have caused controversy, but it stirred up a tiny tempest when it first opened in August—one that seems to have died down as the play settled into a comfortable Broadway run. The *New York Times* (July 31, 1988) printed the usual pre-opening article-interview, the kind of news as publicity that conventionally appears in the Arts & Leisure Section. It was a friendly piece, but Milner responded to it in a letter (*Times*, August 7) in which he insisted that Dennis Watlingon had misheard him, that he wanted to say his say in his own voice. The heart of the letter—unless I, too, am mishearing Milner—is that he rejected the implication that he had tailored the play for Broadway and the white audience that used to be its mainstay. Milner, as playwright and as theorist, has long insisted that black playwrights should write black plays for black audiences, for which they should have an educational function (see *What the Wine-Sellers Buy* and *Season's Reasons*), and the white audience is a secondary concern. Milner's distaste for Watlingon's description of *Checkmates* as "theater whose players happen to be black" is understandable if the phrase suggests accident rather than artistic decision and if it implies some kind of sellout. I suspect that what Watlingon intended was to emphasize the shared material values of both black and white communities and to indicate that the message—if that is not too strong a word for a comedy like *Checkmates*—has relevance to both audiences which—*pace* Milner—I tend to think of as one audience consisting of people who can get up the price of a Broadway theater ticket.

A second problem had to do with the response of the gay audience. One of the points of contention between the young couple in the play is Laura's friendship with a gay designer, with whom she hopes to go into business, and whom Sylvester regularly calls "the fag." Sylvester is often confused and frequently angry, but he is essentially likable, particularly as played by Denzel Washington, which means that a kind of acceptability attaches to the label. It might be argued that a man who made his way out of the Detroit slum would carry his street vocabulary with him and use it within his own home, particularly if the word could be a weapon in a marital quarrel. Yet, dialogue in the theater not only serves characterization, but has a more general use. To understand the response to the reiteration of *fag*, imagine the couple white, the designer black, and the epithet *nigger*. Woodie King, Jr., the director of *Checkmates*, circulated a letter which defended not the word itself, but the rightness of Sylvester's feeling threatened by the designer as a white man. Women in the audience, judging by occasional bursts of applause for Laura's speeches, might have

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suspected that he was threatened by her insistence on her place as a woman in a no longer male-dominated society. King says that white homosexuals and white critics of ethnic descent, once the oppressed, have become the oppressors. That means that if you respond negatively to *Checkmates* you are racist, or—to put it in the vernacular of the play—you can call a fag a fag but not a spade a spade.

The play, like most of Milner's work, is lively, perceptive about the physical and emotional details of daily life, overextended, and given to pushing its ideas more forcefully than they need. It concerns two couples living in the same house. The older couple, the Coopers, have made their way from the poverty of the rural South to Detroit, where Frank, having gained a sense of himself in World War II, has escaped menial jobs to become a contractor and the owner of several properties. We learn all this from flashbacks (which I found awkward) and conversations with the young people, but we get a sense of the Coopers as a couple by the sureness of their playfulness together. The Williamses, their upstairs renters, are incipient Yuppies, over-thinged, who push themselves so hard (he is a liquor salesman, she is a department store buyer) that they seem to be losing themselves and one another. We learn about them by watching them in combat and in embrace and—unhappily—by listening to them talk too much on the telephone. Although the couples seem very different, separated by years and by attitudes toward work, success, and family, they are facing or have faced the same disruptive crises—primarily infidelity and the difficulty of making their way in an essentially white business world. The Coopers have weathered their storms. The Williamses, neither of them able to understand the intensity of the pressures on the other, come apart at the end of the play. The suggestion is that the Coopers made it because they had to find their own way, and the young people's problems are aggravated by current society's fondness for the overexamined life. This is made plain in Sylvester's attack on Laura's idea of self, which he sees as a product of her reading of both black and white women's magazines. But this is a Broadway comedy: although the ending for the young couple is tentatively unhappy, there are lines of self-discovery exchanged just before they part and the chance, even the promise, that a little value-shifting might bring them back together.

Much of the play is conventional, both in its techniques and its critiques of this gimme decade. It is most interesting when Milner violates generic expectations. Laura has a kitchen table chat with Mattie, and Sylvester, when he is most in need of help, turns to Frank. Customarily such scenes provide the moment of revelation that will iron out the grievances and bring the happy ending. Here, they are funny, revealing, touching, but they have no noticeable effect on the developing quarrel between the Williamses. Nor should they. If Laura and Sylvester are going to get back together, they are going to have to do it without the help of the Coopers or *Cosmopolitan*.

Checkmates is a reasonably efficient play with a sensible point to make. It is very well-acted (I was particularly taken with Ruby Dee's Mattie). It neither needs nor deserves to be considered controversial. I prefer plays that are more complex, more elusive. But if you have a taste for the kind of problem comedy that was once a Broadway staple, check out *Checkmates (Closed at the 46th Street Theater)* GERALD WEALES

BOOKS

A hawk with an olive branch

ISRAEL'S FATEFUL HOUR
Yehoshafat Harkabi
Harper & Row, $22.50, 256 pp.

Robert G. Hoyt

At long last there is movement toward the *start* of a *beginning* of *preliminary* negotiations that *may* have a chance of resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict. Recent doings in Algiers, Stockholm, Geneva, Washington, and Tunis demonstrate again, if more proof were needed, that policies of the United States government will greatly affect the pace and direction of movement.

Given these circumstances, we are fortunate to have this updated edition of *Israel's Fateful Hour* on hand now. (It was published last year in England, two years ago in Israel, where it has gone through four printings. The U.S. edition takes account of the *intifadah* and of King Hussein's decision to end Jordan's administrative involvement with the West Bank, but not, of course, of the November declaration of Palestinian statehood or of our government's mid-December decision to open talks with the PLO.) The book is unabashedly pro-Israel, and yet it is attentive to the Arab side and includes strongly worded criticism of the "ethos" informing Israel's Herut party and Likud coalition. Overall, it is sufficiently complex to do justice to a tangled situation, yet lucid and readable.

Lucid? Anyone who writes coherently about the Arab-Israeli conflict must immediately incur suspicion of political innocence or partisan bias. There are too many players for easy clarity: on both sides, factions within factions, on the scene and worldwide. Not only tribes but creeds and ideologies are intricately at war. For the protagonists the stakes are numbingly high: personal and national survival, justice, freedom, land, water, and, for some, revenge; they are distract-

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ingly high for the rest of us because of superpower involvement, the oil factor, the availability of weapons of annihilating power. There is, finally, a surplus of pain-filled history, of centuries-old grievances kept ever fresh by new offenses.

The reason Yehoshafat Harkabi's treatment of this bitter-tasting mishmash achieves clarity is certainly not political naiveté. Currently professor of Middle East studies at Hebrew University, he has been chief of Israel's military intelligence, served as intelligence adviser to then-Prime Minister Menachem Begin, and is the author of earlier studies of the conflict that are cited with respect by other scholars. Primarily, it is the book's steady focus that lends it persuasive coherence. For Harkabi the urgent issues are not: Who started this fight? or, Which side has the stronger claim? but rather: What will work for Israel? Which way does the balance of power tilt now, and how is that likely to change? What, then, is to be done? Those are the questions that properly hold priority now. There comes a time in any bloody and long-standing ethnic-religio-nationalist dispute when continued partisan debate over justice and morality becomes unjust and immoral.

As for bias, Harkabi's commitment to Israel is no hindrance but a help, given the decidedly unsentimental realism of his approach. By his own account, confirmed for me by a knowledgeable source, his earlier studies of Arab and Palestinian attitudes and agendas put him on the side of the Israeli hawks, though not in their camp. Two decades ago he was convinced that the destruction of Israel was not only the Arabs' "grand design"—their ideal goal, their dream—but also the goal of their *policy*, a purpose they believed could be accomplished, therefore a guideline for action, affecting "the way in which the Arabs built up their military forces, organized their societies, developed their economies, and modernized their countries." Talking peace with such an opponent made no sense for Israel, Harkabi argues; one does not set up housekeeping with another who is bent on murder.

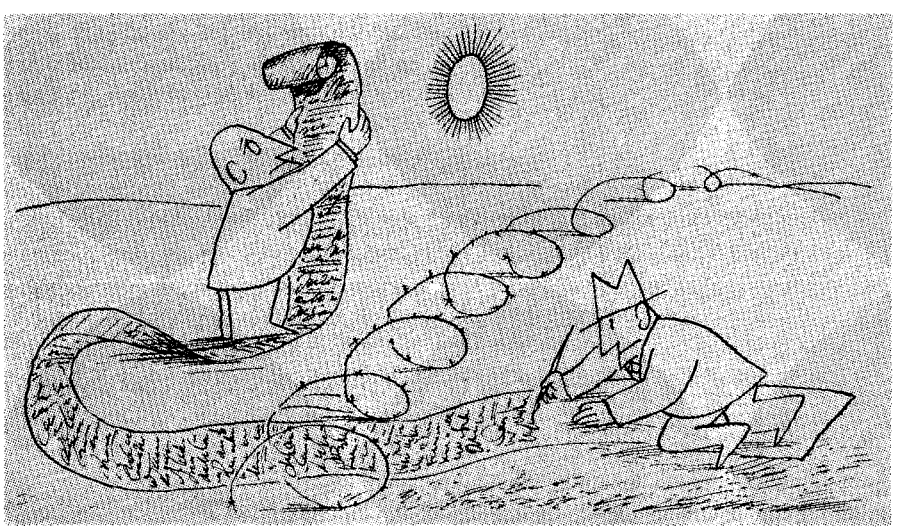
If this is hawkishness, it is pragmatic not ideological. For some in Israel and elsewhere, Arab intransigence has been transformed from a conclusion based on observable current fact into an unshakable dogma—and an excuse for adhering permanently to the Israelis' own "grand design," the dream of establishing dominance over *Eretz Yisrael*: all or most of Palestine, incorporating Gaza and stretching east at least as far as the Jordan River, perhaps northward into Lebanon.

But Harkabi persisted in his Arab-watching. Even while putting the evidence of Arab harshness and adamancy before the Israeli public, he urged understanding of Arab grievances and warned against taking inflexible positions. He gave particular attention to internal Arab and Palestinian disputes over ends and means, tactics and strategy, in their conflict with Israel. When signs of change appeared, verified by the depth and sometimes savagery of these quarrels (Arabs have been murdered for urging a negotiated peace with Israel), he announced them. Three years before Anwar Sadat flew to Jerusalem, for example, Harkabi saw a likelihood that the Egyptian president would act to lift the burden of the conflict from his country's back and budget. In 1974 he found it not realistic to believe that Israel could continue to hold the occupied territories, and "misguided" to refuse any and all negotiations with the PLO.

This defense of his approach appears in a "personal note" in Harkabi's preface. I owe the reader a similar disclosure. The positions the author reports are similar to views I expressed at roughly the same times, though not for identical reasons. In May 1970, for example, he argued for an Israeli declaration of its readiness to withdraw from the West Bank, Gaza, and the Sinai as part of a peace settlement; so did I, as a part-time, distant, dilettantish observer. When he resigned his post as intelligence adviser, his letter to Prime Minister Begin said, "For us to rule Judea and Samaria for an extended period of time is, I believe, impossible." I agreed then, as now.

But Harkabi added: "Would that I be proved wrong." I could not voice that wish: in my view, the occupation is not only dangerous to Israel, it is legally untenable and ethically wrong, anti-democratic and out of harmony with those forms of Zionism I can admire. Now, a non-Jewish, non-Israeli outsider who is not at immediate risk may be justified in criticizing Israeli policy out of abstract considerations of justice and/or out of sympathy with victims on both sides, but it's never comfortable; one could, after all, be wrong, whether out of soft-headedness or some undetected strain of anti-Semitism—and in this conflict there is no room for error. The reader should know, then, that I'm inclined to give a warm welcome to arguments favoring a new Israeli policy that are voiced by a "Machiavellian dove" (Harkabi's tag for himself) and that are based on considerations of realpolitik.

Still, the arguments are well made and carefully defended, to the point where adequate summary is not possible. Har-



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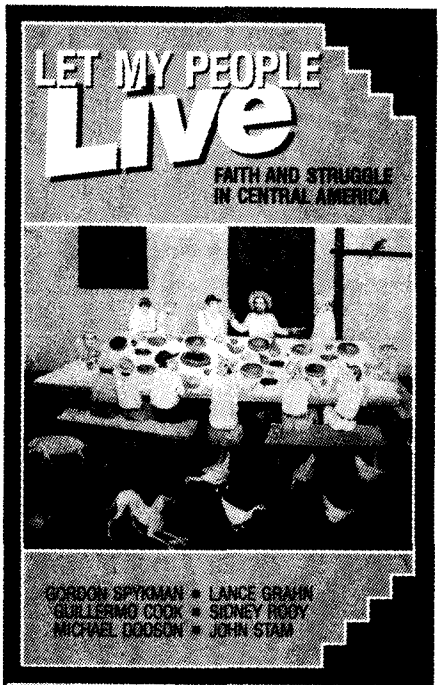

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kabi believes that a solution of the conflict can be achieved, but that no solution will be perfectly safe or perfectly just; Israel does not now have a choice between good and bad options but only between bad and worse. Sharing the land between an Israeli and a Palestinian state will be bad. Israel will be smaller and perhaps less defensible. Irredentism will survive among the Palestinians and it will be easier for them to build the strength of a sovereign state than to hold together a revolutionary movement. But hanging onto the West Bank and Gaza, either as conquered territories or as integral parts of Israel, will be worse. If the Arabs are allowed to remain they will constitute an ungovernable near majority by the year 2000; if they are "transferred" (expelled), Israel will lose legitimacy with many of its own people along with the support of other nations that it absolutely must have to survive, while insuring ascendancy among Arabs and Palestinians of the radical states and leaders that still cling to the original Arab "grand design" calling for elimination of the Jewish state. The conflict would then become "existential," it would be "war to the death." Israel's peace with Egypt would collapse, thereby much quickening the gradual growth of Arab military power vis-à-vis Israel.

Negotiation is now possible (and has been for some time, but won't be for the indefinite future) because Arab "moderates" are precariously in control, or near that point. "Moderates" are those who will never accept Israeli domination of the territories or the region but who have come to regard the grand design as infeasible, even in the distant future, and meantime too costly—not only in blood and money but in lost opportunities for Arab development and modernization. The best *and only* means of confirming this trend is Israeli rejection of Israeli rejectionism. It is not only Arab moderates but the Israeli people who will pay the price for continued inflexibility. (Harkabi would agree, I'm sure, that George Shultz did Israel an enormous favor by opening the door to dialogue.)

If negotiations are to happen, the Palestinians will be the Israelis' chief interlocutors, and Yasir Arafat's PLO will represent them. Weak and stateless as they are, the Palestinians constitute the Arab entity that has the most to negotiate *about*, the clearest claim for redress of grievances, the greatest support among the Arab masses elsewhere; for them, and for the stone-throwing youths of the territories who have done so much to win world opinion and shake the Israeli consensus, the PLO is the embodiment of the Palestinians' cause. Now that Hussein has given up all title to speak for them, there is no Arab ruler or state that claims or can claim that right; and, if the superpowers act in concert to promote a regional settlement, it will be hard for their client states to resist. A continued Israeli effort to demonize the PLO or to choose, by whatever means, the Arabs they will negotiate with will be recognized more and more widely not as a reasonable precondition but as a devious means of saying No to the possibility of peace.

Every step in that chain of reasoning can be challenged; Harkabi anticipates the challenges, describes them fairly, and provides answers that are reasonably satisfying. In this chess game there are no unassailable positions; even as he describes the intricate four-sided interplay among moderates and extremists on both sides, Harkabi acknowledges that he is oversimplifying out of sheer necessity.

For American readers, including many American Jews, I think the most significant passages in the book may be those dealing with the transformation of Israeli attitudes and policies following the Six-Day War, from a relatively modest, pragmatic, and conciliatory vision of Israel's place in the Middle East to the "grand design" of Revisionist Zionism under Menachem Begin and his successors. A grandiose, militaristic, expansionist, ultranationalist ideology that was already in place but never in power gained immensely from Israel's astounding feats of arms in 1967. Harkabi is harsh (I think justifiably) in his indictment of the "Jabotinsky-Begin ethos" (Ze'ev Jabotinsky was the father of Revisionism and Begin's mentor) for its lack of realism and prudence. Unaccountably, however, he gives almost no attention to the loss of élan and orientation on the part of the Labor Alignment which created

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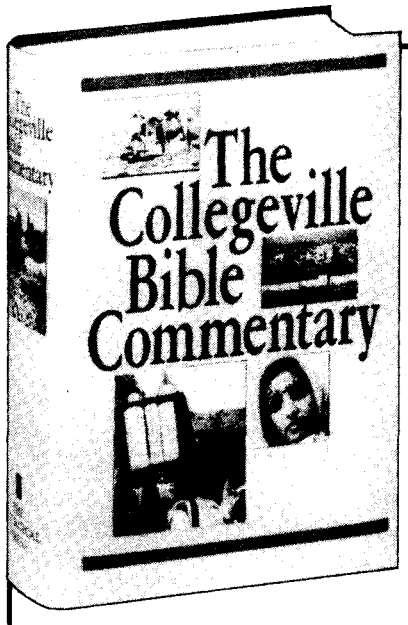
the vacuum that made possible the victory of Herut and the Likud coalition in 1977 (see Amnon Rubenstein, *The Zionist Dream Revisited*, Schocken, 1984; Mitchell Cohen, *Zion and State*, Basil Blackwell, 1987). His near-scornful critique of Peace Now and its adherents for their excessive reliance on moralisms and their failure to produce a comprehensive political program might better have been directed against leaders of the main factions within the Alignment.

Still more interesting, if certainly of lesser importance, is the chapter given to "Nationalistic Judaism." The tactical strength of religious fundamentalism in Israel surfaced for Americans with the presentation of demands by certain religious parties for laws redefining by conservative Orthodox standards the question "Who is a Jew?" (and, therefore, who in the Diaspora can claim Israeli citizenship under the Law of Return). That demand, and the willingness of both Labor and Likud to consider it, roused the anger of Diaspora Jews as has no other development in Israel. That is understandable. But even if enacted, such legislation would affect very few people. Harkabi documents (as Amnon Rubenstein had done earlier) the existence within the Israeli religious right of ideas and proposals that are no less than shocking and that if adopted would altogether change the nature of Israel in the eyes of the world: justifications not only for annexing Judea and Samaria but for expelling and even annihilating the Arab residents; arguments for excluding "idolators" (including Christians and especially Catholics) from residing in Jerusalem, and other notions as repellent. Harkabi acknowledges that these views are held only by a minority within a minority, but notes that it is not only the followers of Rabbi Meir Kahane and the zealots of Gush Emunim who voice them, and he argues that the response of religious leaders and scholars has been indefensibly feeble.

In a way, however, that chapter is a distraction and its content (as the author admits and fears) could be misused. It is my hope that the main thrust of *Israel's Fateful Hour* will be widely understood and honestly debated in this country, par-



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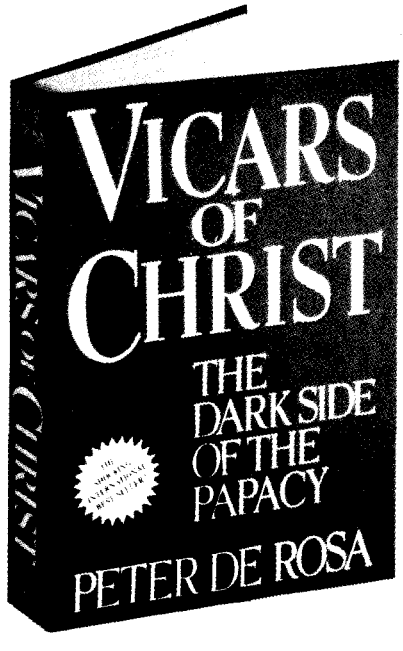

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ticularly among American Catholics. If published articles in mainstream Catholic publications are any indication, there has been a reluctance to accept testimony like that of Yehoshafat Harkabi, though there are many Israelis with like credentials holding similar views. The reason for that, I believe, is the existence of a mountainous residue of Catholic guilt for the Holocaust and all that went before it. It is good to acknowledge the shame of this part of our history, and to keep it always in mind; it is bad to let it cloud our understanding of the present conflict. Whatever priority one has—peace or justice, the security of Israel or the rights of Palestinians, or all of the above—it is more than ever necessary to understand the realities of the hour, which may indeed be fateful for Israel and all concerned. The witness of this coolheaded "Machiavellian dove" badly needs to be heard. □

ROBERT G. HOYT *has written frequently about the Middle East for the* National Catholic Reporter *and* Christianity and Crisis.

CORRESPONDENCE

(Continued from page 2)

mon good within the Hobbesian framework which postulated self-interest as the sole human motivation...[and denied]...the possibility of altruism." The Himeses support their opinion by arguing that Smith included among the objectives of self-interested action the sense of self-worth that comes from performing acts approved by others. This leads to the conclusion that Smith regarded all human behavior as self-interested, but such a conclusion is not consistent with a close reading of Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments*.

There are many places in the *Theory of Moral Sentiments* where Smith indicated that he believed individuals could transcend their self-interest. For example, Smith wrote that "[s]ympathy,...cannot, in any sense be regarded as a selfish principle...[w]hen I condole with you for the loss of your only son...[m]y grief...is entirely upon your account and not in the least upon my own. It is not, therefore, in the least selfish" (*TMS*, Liberty Classics).

He also wrote that he did not believe that a person who approves the passion or the action of another does so because of his interest in the pleasure that comes from the harmony of sympathies. He maintained that the pleasure that is experienced is "always felt so instantaneously, and often upon such frivolous occasions, that it seems evident...[that it cannot]...be derived from any such self-interested consideration." It is, he believed, simply the by-product of the natural principle of sympathy.

Smith further maintained that when we approve of another person's judgment, we do so originally, not because it gives us pleasure, but because we regard it "as right, accurate, and agreeable to truth and reality." The pleasure we obtain is an afterthought. It is not what originally motivated our action. It is clear from these examples that Smith was not a reductionist. He was not willing to explain all purposeful human action as a result of a conscious drive to maximize self-interest.

FRANCIS M. McLAUGHLIN
Associate Professor
Boston College

The authors reply:

Ms. Brigham's concern about competing visions of the common good is well taken. We agree with her perception that forging a consensus among different communities about the common good is a difficult task. But along with John Courtney Murray, we are convinced that it is a necessary one. No short cuts exist to a public philosophy in a democracy such as ours. It is incumbent upon us all, therefore, to contribute to a thoughtful and serious dialogue on the meaning of the American proposition. How this is to be done must be the subject of another article.

Professor McLaughlin's interesting letter correctly notes that Adam Smith described sympathy as operating spontaneously. Smith held that, in the vast majority of instances, sympathy is not a conscious or deliberate choice based on

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calculation of the value of fellow-feeling. But he does maintain in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* that, when analyzed, sympathy is seen to be the imaginative capacity to project ourselves into another's position and so see ourselves as we are seen by the other. We then react to "the sentiments of the real or supposed spectator of our conduct." Thus Smith's ethic of sympathy in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* is coherent with his emphasis on self-interest in *The Wealth of Nations*.

Four comments about Mr. Cohen's letter seem required.

1) Mr. Cohen seems entirely to misunderstand our article. His charge that we fail to reconcile the irreconcilable would be telling had we tried to do so. Rather than reconcile the self-interest of classical liberal ideology with a Catholic understanding of the human, our concern was to make explicit the tension existing between the two.

2) Mr. Cohen again misreads our article as is evident in his complaint that self-interest is not a myth "because its very efficacy is evident." Apparently he interprets the word "myth" as meaning that which is unreal. As we thought obvious in our article, we employed "myth" to designate a paradigmatic account of human social existence. Thus, we do not question the reality of self-interest. Had we done so, we would not have written the article. What we suggested is that self-interest alone is not an adequate explanation of political and economic activity.

3) Mr. Cohen's addition of the adjective "absolute" to community is gratuitous. In our article, we wrote of pluralism and subsidiarity as key elements of Catholic social theory. That is why we advocated a strategy of increased support for a variety of mediating structures in social life. The symbols of eschatology, so important within the Judeo-Christian tradition, wisely temper the zeal of any believer to found *a* perfect society within history.

4) Mr. Cohen advises us to "ruminate empirically" on the comparative promotion of the common good by liberalism and capitalism on the one hand and communitarianism on the other. He concludes that self-interest has done more to promote virtue than communitarianism. We must note that his conclusion is without empirical support.

MICHAEL J. HIMES
KENNETH R. HIMES

Sheed on Buckley

New York, N.Y.

To the Editors: Wilfrid Sheed's piece, "William Buckley's Several Selves" [November 4], was almost as amusing as Buckley himself.

Even so, Sheed shortchanges Buckley in recounting the infamous Vidal-Buckley exchange during the 1968 Democratic Convention. Buckley indeed stooped to gay-baiting Vidal—an embarrassment, ultimately, to gays almost as much as to Buckley. Buckley's attack, however, came from apparent anger *after* Vidal had called him a "crypto-Nazi." Sheed's narrative confuses the sequence of the remarks. Vidal's provocation certainly does not excuse, but helps explain.

I am happy to proffer this mitigation for the man who first brought me into electoral politics. As a nine-year-old I campaigned around the Bronx's Fordham section for Buckley, the 1965 Conservative mayoral candidate who opposed the Civilian Police Review Board which every police officer, including my more-liberal-than-most-cops father, was against.

I atoned for my ideological misdirection by campaigning for George McGovern seven years later, but am still beholden to Buckley.

KEVIN M. DOYLE

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To our 1988 Associates whose generosity has kept us afloat, once again: Thank You.

It is a truth—repeated annually in this space—that without the contributions of our Associates, there would be no *Commonweal*. And this year like last, the contributions of the Associates helped us meet the ever-increasing costs of publication. In 1988 it was a particularly sharp rise in postage and an increase in the cost of paper (yes, even newsprint costs more than you might expect) that threatened the balance sheet; and though 1989 is barely over the horizon, it too promises increases, particularly in our health insurance premiums and typesetting costs. The additional $5,000 the Associates made in contributions in '88 will help. We count on the continuing generosity of the Associates. But as well, we ask those of our readers who are not yet Associates to consider joining the ranks of these generous folk by filling in the form at the end of our annual listing of Associates, which reflects the gifts we have received through December 19, 1988. Thanks again...and again...and again.

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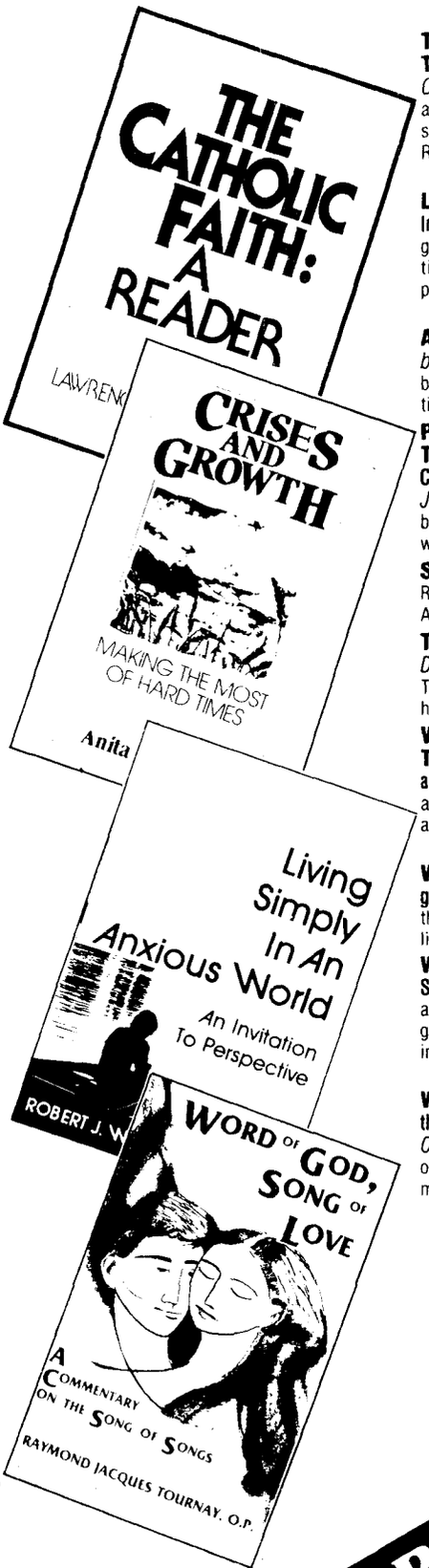
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